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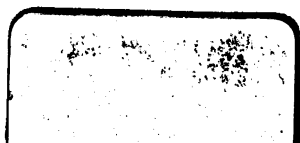
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A LIFE'S LESSONS.

BY

MRS. GORE,

AUTHOR OF

"MAMMON," "MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS," &c.

"Il y a de la poésie dans ce tableau. La vie s'y dresse avec ses haillons et ses paillettes;—mais toute soudaine,—incomplète,—comme elle est réellement."—BALZAC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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A LIFE'S LESSONS.

CHAPTER I.

HAD poor Nannie been required to name the individual whom, of all living beings, she would prefer to welcome at that moment, it would have been the man who now pressed his hands between her own, and noted, with grieving eyes, the emaciation and pallor arising from her recent illness.

But though his coming was as acceptable as on that memorable night at Gridlands, when the sound of his voice had caused her

to rush into his arms, no outward demonstration now denoted her joy. Times were altered with both. Nannie had since progressed into Miss Balfour; Elisha Hildyard into E. H. Nannie had become a delicate woman; Elisha, if not a robust man, at least manly and active. His hair, deepened into auburn, set off to advantage his refined lineaments; while his address, composed and self-possessed, had a charm peculiarly its own. Nina Brent would be, indeed, fortunate, if she were fated to realise her mother's ambitious projects!—

“But what brings you hither, and how could you possibly know of my being here?” inquired his cousin, after they had interchanged their first hurried but affectionate greetings—during which Madame Duménil had judiciously stolen off to join the family council of the *Châtelaine*.

“I heard it from Lord Garstang, a sincere friend of yours, Nannie. On finding you

seriously ill at Milan, yet on the eve of a journey through France and Belgium, from which even a man, and in health, would have shrunk at that moment, he wrote to me, dearest cousin, as to your nearest relative, imploring my influence to suspend your rash movements."

"Doubtless he meant well. But why interfere in my affairs?"

"Because he dearly loves you; a plea, Nannie, which you have never been forward to recognise! On receiving his letter, I wrote to you, to Milan, Marseilles, Lyons, Dijon. Not expecting letters, you probably never inquired at the Poste Restante, where they are still lying."

"Then, since they will never reach me, tell me their purport?"

"To entreat that you would not delay a single hour upon the road. To forewarn you of all that has since occurred in Paris. To beg that, instead of a prolonged sojourn with

a Belgian family marked out for party animosity, you would proceed, night and day, to Antwerp ; where a small steamer, chartered by Zelters and Co., and bearing Dutch letters of marque, awaits your orders."

"Dear Ely !—How kind,—how provident !"

"On arriving at Antwerp, in the Groot Brittanje, I found that the insurrection had progressed far more rapidly than even Garstang had foretold. I landed in the midst of armed Orangeists, driven back from their assault upon Brussels, and infuriated by defeat. Zelters and his patrons the Van der Heldes, are, like reasonable beings, far from adverse to the projected dismemberment of the two kingdoms ; otherwise, the husband of your friend Clémence, my dear Nannie, might be in arms against his brother-in-law, as Fabian Zelters, the nephew of your good old guardian, is at this moment. Nay ! he might have been the very antagonist from whom the Comte de Lanville received his all but fatal wound."

"His all but fatal wound!" cried Miss Balfour, starting eagerly forward. "And the surgeons, who have deceived his poor wife by a certificate that he is free from danger!"

Mr. Hildyard's countenance became overclouded. "I know not what may be the professional view of the case," said he. "But Garstang, of whom I took leave this morning, at daybreak, assured me he had little hope."

"What—what will become of poor Eglantine!"—cried Miss Balfour—"loving him as she does; and, perhaps, arriving only in time to see him a corpse!"

"She will have the comfort of knowing that her husband fell in defence of the liberties of his country."

"No, no! Do not attempt to palliate the misfortune by high-sounding words," rejoined Miss Balfour. "Such sentiments may have sufficed to Roman fathers or Grecian heroes. But Christian wives, Christian mothers, find little compensation for the loss of their children's

father, in the fact that they were slain in a struggle which may, perhaps, only avail to benefit factious and ambitious men. 'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's,' saith the Scriptures. But I find no warrant for the spilling of blood in gathering the tribute-money.—As to my dear friends, the Lanvilles, had you seen them, as I have lately done, in Rome, living for each other, without a thought or feeling unshared by both, you would know what must be the bitterness of such a parting!—No, do not deceive yourself, Ely.—The careless thanks of what is vaguely called one's country, cannot repay the sacrifice of such affection."

"You speak with some warmth,"—Mr. Hildyard was beginning, gazing with wonder and admiration on the gleam of enthusiasm that brightened her beautiful face.

"I do. For if ever I saw perfect love and perfect happiness on earth, it was in the home of the Lanvilles."

Little did she suspect what a thrill of joy was conveyed to the heart of her cousin by the frank firmness of her words. Not that a syllable of the vile inventions of Sir Ralph and his gossiping crew had, for a moment, disturbed his mind. But it was gratifying to obtain this candid and gratuitous exposition of her sentiments. Certain Gridlands reminiscences had predisposed him strongly against the young Count. But from that moment, he became as sincere as Lord Garstang himself in the desire for his recovery.

On the other hand, the influence of Miss Balfour's expanded beauty of form and mind was at once exquisite and painful.

In the three years of absence during which he had been vainly endeavouring to wean his affection from their first and only attachment, how often had he dwelt upon the artless charms of her unformed girlhood—

Her household motions, light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty !

And now, he beheld her perfected in every charm, fairer than ever, dearer than ever, but with an insurmountable barrier between them.

“But you asked me *why* I was here, my dear cousin,” said he, endeavouring to fling aside his load of care ;—“yet have not suffered me to explain my errand.”

“You told me, I thought, that it was to afford me the protection of my nearest kinsman,” said Miss Balfour, almost intimidated by his earnest gaze.

“*That* indeed brought me to Belgium. But when startled at Antwerp, by the grievous intelligence I obtained from Colonel Zelters (Prince Frederick’s aide-de-camp), that, on that very morning, a British nobleman, most amiable and most beloved, had fallen a victim to a random shot of the Orangeists, and that another English lord was slightly wounded while conveying from the Park the insensible body of the Comte de Lanville, I lost not a

moment in starting for Brussels.' I had little doubt that the nameless English lord was Garstang!"

"Lord Garstang *wounded?*" cried Nannie, with eager interest.

"Very slightly. A sabre cut, that barely obliges him to wear his arm in a sling. I found him, as I anticipated, at the Hôtel de Lanville; but far more anxious concerning you and your dangers, Nannie, than about the suffering Count."

"As your friend, and commissioned by *you*, he has, throughout the winter, very kindly interested himself in my behalf."

"Remember what you said just now, dear Nannie, and do not mislead yourself by plausible words. It is *not* on my account he feels for you; it is as your passionate lover."

"No, no! I will not believe it. I do not wish to believe it. Let me not learn that I have again lost a friend!"

"This is no time, my dear cousin, for

prudish or ungenerous trifling," rejoined Hildyard, gravely. "It is a moment to speak out, Nannie; it is a moment to listen seriously. I have come hither to-night, charged with two painful missions. One, I have already fulfilled: to signify, namely, to a tender wife, the peril of her husband. The other task, nearly as distasteful, is to offer you the heart and hand of Lord Garstang. Amidst all these dangers and misery, he wishes to acquire the legal right of becoming your protector."

It would have been hard to say which of the two cousins exhibited at that moment the more death-like paleness, the more anxious countenance:—Hildyard, convinced that the proposals he was forced to tender would be sooner or later accepted; Nannie, perceiving at once, in this intervention, that she had lost all hold over the heart of her cousin. He could not otherwise thus woo her to be the wife of another!

Her lips refused to form an articulate reply.

"In justice both to him and yourself, Nannie," he continued, endeavouring to resume the appearance of self-command—"I must further apprise you of what, if not already known to you, it may be a severe trial to learn. When you so frankly informed me, three years ago, of the state of your affections—preventing me from cherishing fruitless hopes and mercifully compelling me to turn elsewhere for a purpose in life,—when you told me in plain words, that you loved another,—that other became an object of intense interest to me, as the arbiter of your future fate. I ascertained from poor old David Hurdis that, after his mother's death, Maurice Varnham had returned no more to Middledale; and that no tidings of him could have reached you, since you were making inquiries after him in every available quarter. Do not be angry with the Brents, dear cousin, if they unwittingly betrayed your confidence."

"I inquired, because I had a sacred duty

to discharge towards him," said Miss Balfour, in a low voice. "A letter for him was entrusted to my hands by his dying mother."

"When I found," resumed her cousin without noticing her interruption, "that you were unable to obtain the smallest clue to his movements, I endeavoured to lend you what assistance lay in my power; and have been unremitting in following up my search. It was not, however, till two months ago, when my mother lay upon her death bed,—that I discovered the sad truth."

Involuntarily, Miss Balfour shuddered. That ignominious fact, then, which she would have fain concealed from all the world, was known also to her cousin!—

"When I next addressed you," he resumed, "I was too deeply absorbed in my own domestic misfortune, to refer to yours. I had been hearing, too, so much of you, just then, from the Brents, from Garstang, from others, that I felt uncertain whether, changed

as they described you, I ought to communicate what might be no longer interesting to your feelings."

"Say rather what, under any circumstances, it must be deeply humiliating to me to learn."

"*Humiliating?*" interrupted Hildyard, in some surprise. "In what way could it humiliate you to hear that the vessel in which that unfortunate young man embarked for Bombay, foundered at sea in rounding the Cape, when every soul on board perished?"

Three years before, such intelligence would have inflicted a death-blow. It was now but an echo of long-accepted convictions. Over Maurice, she had wept as dead: and from his memory she had recently learned to shrink, as from that of a convicted deceiver. It was almost a consolation that he no longer survived to become an object of estrangement.

Scarcely knowing whether to rejoice or regret that the tears bathing her cheeks were so devoid of passion or bitterness, her cousin

contemplated her in silence. The modified nature of her sympathy was so apparent, that he did not scruple to pursue his narrative.

"And thus," said he, "knowing you to be liberated from an injurious engagement, I could not refuse to accept Lord Garstang's commission. No!—do not interrupt me, Nannie—hear me to an end. He tells me that you have discouraged his suit,—that Madame Duménil, or some friend of hers, has even given him reason to suppose your affections pre-engaged. Yet, in spite of all this, he frankly offers you his hand."

"Which I as frankly reject."

"Not over-hastily. You owe it to yourself and him, to deliberate. Lord Garstang has qualities which entitle him to respect, and a position that demands consideration. His wife will exercise important influence over the well-being of thousands, as well as in that motley throng which calls itself society. Garstang is the most rising man of the day; and

wealth, precedence, a thousand endowments and enjoyments, are included in the name of Countess of Mardyke."

"I am not ambitious, cousin Ely," Nannie was beginning—

"I doubt it,—I doubt it! You, humbly born, have, from the time you could act on your own account, systematically sought associations superior to your birth. You are what the world calls a *parvenue*, Nannie; and for such, marriage affords the only means of social elevation. Men command a thousand avenues to distinction: women, alas! but one."

"And that one, a degradation! But enough of this painful topic. Call it false-pride—cold-heartedness—miscalculation of my own claims—what you will; but nothing you can say will ever induce me to become the wife of Lord Garstang."

"It is not for me, perhaps, to combat your resolution, Nannie," he was beginning—

But at that moment, the door of the saloon was thrown open, and Madame de Lanville, equipped for a journey, followed by her sister-in-law and the nurse holding Eugénie asleep in her arms, made their appearance.

"I could not go without pressing you once more to my heart," said Eglantine, hurriedly approaching Miss Balfour, and warmly embracing her. "Your better reason will have shown you, by this time, that it was impossible you should bear us company. Another carriage would have been required ; and it is only by bribing largely the postilion who brought this gentleman hither, that we have obtained the means of transit for *one*. Dear Lucille, be patient ! You will be safe here in the care of Madame Duménil, and under the protection of your cousin, till public tranquillity is in some measure restored. On our arrival in Brussels, aid and advice shall be instantly dispatched to you. Meanwhile, be this your home. Command here as you will. I

have given orders that render you mistress of the Château de Lanville."

Had the Countess been capable of much observation, she could not but have noticed the change effected in Miss Balfour's inclinations by the lapse of a single hour. She no longer remonstrated,—no longer pleaded to accompany them to Brussels. Her complexion had acquired a more natural hue; her temper a more even mood. She accepted the departure of her friends as an evil against which it was useless to contend. Her farewell, though affectionate and tearful, was perfectly resigned.

CHAPTER II.

FEW of the inmates of the Château de Lanville closed their eyes that night. Past, present, future,—all was grief and anxiety. By sunrise, the messenger dispatched by Honoré to Dinant, arrived to increase their alarms, by news that no horses were to be had, except for the service of government. He brought reports, too, of a strong counter-movement in the industrial districts against the progress of the revolution. The King being a large shareholder in many of their companies and speculations, a number of hands, thrown out of employ in the mines and forges, were making head against the patriotic cause, and producing

terrible disturbance. As Lord Garstang had long ago predicted, the spark once lighted, no one could conjecture where the conflagration was to end.

The grey-haired Majordôme was at his wits' end. Himself the most devoted and respectful of servitors, he expected similar deference on the part of the tenants of the Comte de Lanville; whom he considered as much the vassals of his noble master as at the epoch when the Counts themselves were vassals of the Dukes of Burgundy. Amidst the panic produced the preceding day by the approach of the malcontents, having ascertained that the ancient *grille* was somewhat shaky on its hinges and rusty in its bolts, he had sent off in hot haste to the neighbouring village of Villers for the smith who usually officiated at the château, to place it in a condition to resist future attacks. But the man not only refused to obey the summons, but stated that he was engaged to attend a public meet-

ing at Givet, convened to decide on the best mode of putting down the rebellion instigated by the enemies of the House of Orange, and of Public Order.

The old man was forced, therefore, to content himself with the services of the blacksmith attached to the stable department at Lanville ; who set about rectifying the dislocated locks and bolts of the old gateway, precisely as though shoeing a horse. Poor Honoré standing by in sullen and dignified silence.

It proved, however, that he was by no means premature in his preparations. While Miss Balfour and her cousin still sat over their morning coffee, discussing the anxieties of the night, Madame Duménil rushed into the room, proclaiming that, as Sœur Véronique had confided to her hands the key of the secret passage, she had thought it best to examine, with old Hermann, the nature and facilities of the descent through the rocks ; lest, at some critical moment, they might be at fault.

“A frightful abyss disclosed itself, my child,” said she, panting for breath, “an awful winding stair, through damp and darkness, and Heaven above knows what! I had not courage to attempt it. In the life of the present Count, it has never once been used. In peaceful times, it is necessarily abandoned and forgotten, and is probably full of vermin, reptiles, and choke-damp. Ah! me,—that ever we should find occasion to have recourse to such extremities!”

“But there is no occasion, Madame, that I am aware of, to have recourse to them,” said Mr. Hildyard, “still less, for your painful emotion. Compose yourself. Miss Balfour is in no state to be unnecessarily agitated.”

“*Unnecessarily?*” exclaimed the indignant *dame de compagnie*,—“when the whole kingdom is in a state of revolution—the whole district in an uproar!”—

“And yet on my road hither, last evening,” persisted Mr. Hildyard, “the only sound that met my ear was the brattle of the water-

mills on the Lesse, and the lowing of the cattle in the pastures."

"You were fortunate, sir," retorted Madame Duménil, still in all the excitement of having lifted the only trap-door, and stood on the brink of the only subterranean passage, which had ever met her eye, out of the pages of a romance. But, finding it impossible to communicate her nervous tremors to her companions, she quitted the room as hastily as she had entered it; consoled by being, at least, the custodian of a secret, and a confidential pass-key.

"Admit that nothing can be more re-assuring than the tranquillity of yonder landscape," he persisted, leading Miss Balfour gently to a stone balcony, opening by folding windows from the eating-hall, and overhanging by a height of nearly a hundred feet, the valley of the Lesse.

"A beautiful prospect, is it not, Ely?" she replied, restored by his presence of mind.

"Poor Middledale would look featureless indeed, after this picturesque valley!"—

"I remember thinking Middledale a paradise on earth," he replied, in a low voice. "I might judge it differently now. But had you ever visited Clifton, Nannie, (where your presence was so earnestly desired,) I think you would allow that our cottage on the Avon commanded a view still lovelier, though less imposing, than even this swallow's-nest of a château. To me, the amenities of Nature are preferable to her sublimities."

"The site of this house, selected in the days of billmen and bowmen, as out of human reach, is certainly too elevated for modern convenience. It always brings to my mind the description of Macbeth's ill-omened castle;—fit abode for these heroes," said she pointing towards the grim portraits, in mail, or buff-coats, of early Counts de Lanville, most of them wearing the insignia of the Toison d'Or, and marked at the corner with the armorial

bearings of the family, in addition to the name and title of the Baron or Count represented. "Such reminiscences, and such emblazonments, you despise !"

"Why should you think so? As historical records, no one appreciates them more highly. The Burgundian Golden Fleece, ere it became dishonoured into a bribe or guerdon for Spanish mercenaries and adventurers, comprehended the flower of chivalry. Nobody can read Froissart or Monstrelet, and presume to despise the Herald's gentle science. When crests were worn on the helm, that the knight, with his visor down, might be distinguished in battle by his retainers, they had a purpose ; and all honour to those who bear them in right of such heroic descent ! Of such distinctions, were they mine, my dear cousin, I should be proud ; though not, perhaps, *so* proud as to bear the name of Barneveldt or Heinsius, in the land of our ancestors. But admit that the pomp of heraldry becomes ridiculous, when our Manchester mil-

lionnaires, the Pierces, Stodarts, hundreds of others,—the moment they acquire a carriage, display upon it a coat of arms worthy of a Paladin ! If they choose to exhibit any mark of ownership beyond a modest cypher, it should be a spinning-jenny, or a handloom ; as mine should be a weaver's shuttle, and yours a ploughshare."

Miss Balfour was about to relate to her cousin the contempt exhibited towards her, at Rome, by George Stodart. But Elisha had not patience to hear of them.

"From one of Garstang's letters," said he, "I learnt how much out of his depth young Stodart was swimming. His father, a first-rate man, as intelligent as enterprising, will soon reduce the young impostor to reason."

He paused, for at that moment his ear was caught by a sound far below in the valley, very different from that of the water-mills he had been describing, which were inaudible at

that great elevation. Without noticing it to his cousin, he gently raised her arm from the stone balustrade against which she was leaning, and drawing it within his own, led her back into the room, and closed the windows.

"The morning air is too keen for you, Nannie," said he, "or my talk has wearied you ; for you look pale. Take a short rest on the sofa ; and I will go and apprise Madame Duménil that you are alone."

Before she could remonstrate against the latter proposal, he had left her. But, instead of the repose he had suggested, her weariness found relief in tears. It gave her far more pain than pleasure to find him so willing to converse on indifferent subjects. She could not bear to find herself treated by him as a common acquaintance.

Meanwhile, he hastened in search of Honoré, and on reaching the opposite extremity of the château, where a long gallery overlooked the courtyard, he found that he had not mistaken

the nature of the distant murmur, rendered familiar to him in his boyhood by more than one Manchester strike : the murmur of hundreds of discontented angry voices !

He discerned, too, in a moment, that Honoré, or some other servant in authority, had been guilty of the imprudence of closing and barricading the *grille* of the courtyard. For those dilapidated gates, however much restored, were incapable of resistance ; and the multitude, in succeeding in bursting them open, would fancy they had accomplished a victory ; whereas the low-browed, iron-knobbed, oaken door of the château, coeval with the more ancient part of the edifice, might, with its rude bolts and bars, hold at bay any thing short of a catapult.

Resolved, at least, to amend the error as far as lay in his power, by causing all the avenues of the house to be carefully barred, he rushed down the nearest staircase, in the hope of gaining the offices. But alas ! unfamiliar

with the byways of the château, he found himself, on reaching the bottom of its rambling descent, with no other sortie than the terrace facing the river, in the opposite direction of the court-yard. Worse still, in the vestibule at the foot of the stairs, he ran against the distracted Madame Duménil, rushing hither and thither, and, like a bull in the arena, preparing herself for conflict by closing her eyes. So at least it was to be inferred ; for she mistook Mr. Hildyard for a leader of the insurgents ; and shrieked forth her entreaties that her life, and that of Mademoiselle, might be spared.

The sound of his voice undeceived her. But her insane terrors found vent in insisting that they should take instant refuge in the vaults. Brandishing the key of the subterranean passage, she implored him to bring down Nannie in his arms, without a moment's delay, and accompany her to the secret passage.

“In order to kill her at once, with foul air

and terror?" he replied. "There is no occasion for any such wild proceeding."

"But since such, sir, was the command of Madame de Lanville, I insist on your obeying her orders and mine," she exclaimed, with an imperial gesture, which Mademoiselle George might have borrowed, with advantage, for her representation of Semiramis.

But the crisis admitted of no trifling. Gently forcing the bewildered *dame de compagnie* into the nearest chamber, (which happened to be a keeping-room or buttery hatch, tolerably out of hearing of the rest of the château,) Elisha Hildyard turned the key in the door, and left her to her indignant antics. One of a group of terrified servants, whom he met a moment afterwards huddled together in a dark passage, undertook to conduct him to "Monsieur Honoré." But Monsieur Honoré, himself, when found, was so busy, locking and re-locking his plate-closet, and finding a safe hiding-place for the keys of his cellars, that neither aid nor counsel

could be obtained from him. The old man's features were convulsed, and his knees knocking together with terror.

Elisha saw that he must take upon himself the post of authority. Not a moment was to be lost. The glimpse he had obtained of the assailants, from the gallery window, satisfied him that they belonged to that class of lawless marauders who gather together simultaneously in every popular tumult. The groom who had acted as his guide, assured him they were miners and forgermen. But the mob appeared to be formed of far more heterogeneous materials.

Calling upon this man, and his English servant, to follow him, Hildyard proceeded into the great hall, and ordered the brave Belgian to unbar the portal.

"Impossible!" was the reply. "The insurgents are at this moment battering down the iron gates. In five minutes they would force their way into the house, if thus ex-

posed ; and pillage and slaughter must follow."

Mr. Hildyard instantly desired his own horror-struck servant to assist him in undrawing the bolts ; and in another second, he emerged upon the doorstep ;—just in time to witness the throwing down from their hinges of the huge iron gates, when, as was predicted, the mob, with a triumphant yell, rushed into the courtyard !—

The sight of a single man, slender, unarmed, bareheaded, quietly awaiting their inbreak, so startled the forwardest of the throng, that for a moment they stayed their steps. A temporary hush ensued.

"What are you seeking here, my friend?" demanded Mr. Hildyard, in a clear voice ; addressing himself specially to one who appeared to be their leader ; a man wearing a beaver-skin cap, and brewer's canvas skirt, with an Orange scarf tied round his waist, as a badge of authority. "What do you want?"

"Arms, ammunition, bread!" was the curt reply.

"The latter you can have, so far as the resources of the house will supply you. Arms and ammunition, there are none at Lanville."

"Then they were conveyed away by the Count, when he skulked to Brussels to conspire against the government," cried the brewer in a surly voice. And Elisha began to fear that he had little chance of influencing that uproarious multitude; so few among them were likely to understand more than the Walloon dialect, of which he spoke not a word. For their leader suddenly addressing them in that language—to what purport he knew not,—a still more violent shout arose from the outskirts of the crowd. They seemed to be encouraging each other to rush forward into the hall.

Of the ill-looking crew, a few of the foremost were armed with pistols stuck in their blouse belts. But the greater number bore only

scythe handles or cudgels. Still, the *animus* uniting them, rendered them alarming assailants.

With his habitual presence of mind, Hildyard now drew forth a paper which he had that morning placed in his pocket in order to exhibit it to his cousin, and advanced upon the intruders, motioning to them to retire; when lo! the astonished crowd, persuaded that he was about to make some important revelation, retreated without remonstrance. When he reached the centre of the courtyard, he proposed in a loud voice, that such among them as understood the French language, should stand forward.

About fourteen obeyed the invitation; savage-looking fellows, probably fugitives involved in the recent outbreak in Paris; for they appeared to have little in common with the Walloon workmen.

"Which among you can read?" said Elisha, knowing how rare was that advantage among the French peasantry.

"Here, you, Gilles!" cried the brewer, dragging forward a squint-eyed individual, who had sneaked away from the foremost rank, and proved to be the school-master of Villers. "*You* are the best scholar among us. —Pluck up courage, man!"

"It requires no great courage on his part," said Mr. Hildyard, "to read and interpret the paper I hold in my hand." And he proceeded to place before the eyes of the brewer, a cabinet passport, bearing in the usual form the Royal arms of the Netherlands; (with the superadded *visá* of the Dutch Minister of Police, and counter-signature of Prince Frederick of Orange,) requiring the "loving lieges of his Majesty the King of the Netherlands to afford such aid and succour as might be required to the bearer, and the persons who might be in his company."

Elsewhere than with an untaught mob, such a passport would have been of small

account. But Colonel Zelters had been careful to remit with it to young Hildyard, the Orange ribbon fringed with silver, assumed by the citizens of Antwerp and other Belgian towns, as a temporary party badge; and this ensign, furthered by the royal arms and royal signature, sufficed to accredit the stranger's assertion that one word of his mouth or line of his pen, would bring down upon them a brigade of troops from Dinant, Huy, or Luxembourg.

A startling announcement. Nothing but their conviction of the unprotected state of the château, whose master, as was now publicly known, lay wounded at Brussels, had determined their attack upon Lanville; and behold, they found the place in the possession of Orangeists! Unable to understand the position held in the house by the well-dressed stranger who so composedly addressed them, the more enlightened believed him to be a Dutch Commissioner, dispatched by government

to take possession of the confiscated property of the Count.

After the recitation, by Gilles, of the official document, a short conference among themselves decided them to fall back upon the original offer of personal relief. Since they must not devastate the place, let them at least be fed.

Young Hildyard became, however, almost alarmed in his turn, when he discovered the unwillingness of Honoré to complete the engagement. The moment the old man discovered that the authority of their guest had disarmed the turbulence of the "*canaille*," he was for keeping no terms with them. "Such beggarly outcasts deserved no refreshment. He was not going to waste his master's substance in entertaining thieves and ruffians."

"In that case," said Hildyard, firmly, "you leave me no alternative but to entitle them to help themselves, or preserve the property of the Count from spoliation by gratuities from my own pocket."

Shamed into compliance, the major-dômo reluctantly ordered the available provisions of the château to be brought forth. Bread, meat, cheese, and dried fish were liberally supplied ; with Louvain beer of the poorest quality, and in quantity so scanty, as to justify the prudence of the old *maitre-d'hôtel*. "Fierce enough when sober," he said, "such fellows were not to be trusted with drink."

Apparently the council of fourteen had already agreed with Gilles and the brewer, that the sooner they quitted a spot under the immediate protection of government, the safer for themselves. They were not prepared to meet the smallest detachment of troops ; and, for aught they knew, an estafette might have been already dispatched to Dinant. They soon began to file off in parties. Their voices, cheered by food, were heard slowly descending the hills. Within an hour of their triumphant assault upon the gates, not a man remained in the court-yard. The servants of the château

were beginning to clear away the marks of their temporary possession, and hasty feast.

As the tramp of the defeated multitude died away in the distance, the overjoyed household began to congratulate each other, and exalt in terms of enthusiasm the heroic conduct, as they called it, of the young stranger. They compelled even poor Madame Duménil to applaud, and be thankful for their deliverance. Her outcries having at length drawn the attention of a passing servant, and obtained her release, she had crept forth, among the rest, to examine the scene of action; —the huge gates encumbering the court-yard, —the overturned beer-barrels,— well-picked bones,—and pungent odour betraying the recent presence of a reeking mob.

Though still mortified at having been incarcerated in a buttery-hatch, instead of a subterranean passage worthy the Castle of Otranto, which would have endowed her with romantic interest for the remainder of her

days, she was glad to have escaped the sight of the "ruffianly monsters" described in glowing terms by the ladies' maids. Even against the imperative cousin of Nannie, she bore no malice, now that danger was at an end. Good nature predominated over her weakness of mind, like sunshine over some flat, unmeaning landscape.

CHAPTER III.

NEEDS it to relate, that while the agitated old lady was allowing her well-frizzed *touffes* of "sable-silvered" hair to become dishevelled by the autumnal breezes, Hildyard was occupied in soothing the agitation of his terrified cousin?—

Having hastily quitted the court-yard and rushed up stairs as soon as the enemy began to retreat in earnest, he expected to find Miss Balfour quietly reposing on the sofa, where he had left her. But the overthrow of the massy iron gates had shaken the château to its foundation, and startled her from her rest ; and, on hastening, in the panic

of her first alarm, to the gallery, shortly before visited by Mr. Hildyard for the purpose of inspection, she became, from the window he had left open, a spectatress of the foregoing scene.

It was there that, clinging to one of the old oak seats of the gallery, he found her. It was there her tears and thanks and enthusiasm burst fluently forth. But all were eagerly checked by her cousin. He would not sanction the exaggeration into which her nervous terrors seemed likely to betray her.

“No such great exercise of heroism!” said he, with his usual calm smile, as he led her back into the sitting-room, so as to lose sight of the scene of disorder, and resume their far pleasanter survey of the rippling waters of the Lesse. “The noble science of heraldry, at which we were laughing an hour ago, had its share in the victory. The effigy of the very tame-looking Belgic Lion did more to authenticate my importance than all my per-

sonal valour; and Fabian Zelters's ell of yellow ribbon was far more eloquent than my harangue!"

"No one but yourself would have had the courage to advance single-handed on those savages."

"No one but myself, perhaps, might have had the *prudence*. Your hot-headed friend, the Count, would have made a sortie upon them with his whole household, and been driven back in confusion. So might I, perhaps, had not females made part of my garrison. However, thus much we have learned from this morning's adventure;—that even a day's further sojourn here is dangerous. We must lose no time, Nannie, in making our way to Antwerp. My unfortunate passport will scarcely play a second time the part of Giant."

"I am ready, quite ready," she replied, with a cheerful smile, though evidently scarce able to stand.

"*Too* ready. We cannot start till night-fall. I made arrangements last night with the servant who escorted Madame de Lanville, and the postilion who drove her, that the latter should return here at dusk this evening, and the former secure a relay of horses for us at Huy: a pair to each carriage."

"But will not one carriage suffice?"

"You forget the servants. We must travel all night. I should recommend you to take my *dormeuse*, which, English built, is easier than your barouche."

"In the morning, then, we shall reach Brussels?"

"No, Nannie. We must avoid Brussels. From Louvain, we must cross the country by Malines. In your present state, I cannot expose you to the tumults and dangers of a beleaguered city."

"Am I to leave Belgium, then, without taking leave of the Lanville family? Oh, no,

dear cousin !—One hour only, to bid them farewell.”

“Take care,” said he, with a smile, “that I do not form the same inference as Sir Ralph, or utter the same warnings as Madame Duménil !”

“I am not afraid. But it is so unlikely I shall ever return to the continent, that I own I would fain have given a last embrace to my dear Véronique before she returns to her convent. However, what you decide must be right.”

To his decision, therefore, both adhered ;—and, in spite of a very inconvenient *attaque de nerfs* on the part of Madame Duménil, Miss Balfour found herself installed that evening, in a comfortable carriage, with every preparation accomplished. She would rather have been spared a *tête-à-tête* with her nervous companion. But Mr. Hildyard had so planned it ; and she was beginning to succumb to the calm, silent inflexibility of E. H.

As he had anticipated, wearied by the day's exertions, both ladies soon fell asleep. It was only at Tirlemont they were roused by a slight altercation between the postmaster and Hermann. But there, again, the exhibition of Mr. Hildyard's passport sufficed. As part of his "company," they were furnished with horses, and suffered to proceed. At Louvain, which they traversed as day was breaking, the garrison was under arms.

From that period till they reached Antwerp, the route bore evidence of the disturbed state of the country. Troops of cavalry patrolled the road ; and near Malines, a small encampment commanded the gates of the town.

Still, no positive disorders were perceptible, as on their recent progress through France. Twice, in the course of their journey, Mr. Hildyard insisted on their alighting for half an hour's refreshment. But he made his appearance only to receive them from and replace them in the carriage ; devoting the interval to

inquiries as to the state of affairs in Brussels and Antwerp; the result of which satisfied him that it would be advisable to embark the very moment of their arrival. The prudent concessions made by Prince Frederick to the necessities of the crisis, had been unfortunately cancelled by the King. An estafette from the Hague, the preceding day, had again stirred up the animosities of the nation!

After having deposited his travelling-companions, therefore, at the Hotel St. Antoine, with an entreaty that they would hold themselves in readiness for immediate embarkation, he hurried off Hermann to the Mairie to obtain the *visá* enabling them to go on board; and proceeded to the head-quarters of the Prince, for a farewell interview with Colonel Zelters. Just, however, as he was about to present himself, he was overtaken by the old courier, breathless with indignation. The *Groot Brittanje* had been taken possession of by

government, and was to start in an hour for Rotterdam!—

Luckily, Colonel Zelters was at his post, to afford advice and assistance.

“It is even so, my dear sir, and you must forgive us,” said he, in answer to the expostulations of Hildyard. “Necessity knows no law.—No, no! Don’t talk about violation of the property of individuals. In times like these, no individual possesses property. Look at the pillage of Brussels! If the palaces of the King are seized upon, don’t grudge us a few days’ use of your little steamer, which was lying idle in the basin.”

“But those few days are a matter of life and death to the invalid lady I am conveying to England, for whose use the vessel was chartered!”

“You have too much Dutch blood in your veins, my dear Mr. Hildyard,” retorted the aide-de-camp, “not to admit the superior claims of him to whose use it has been appro-

priated. Our brave General Dopfers, desperately wounded at the head of his brigade, the other day in the retreat upon Vilvorde, and condemned by the surgeons, has entreated to go and die in the bosom of his family. —He has just been borne, on the shoulders of his men, on board the Groot Brittanje. Had you witnessed his progress to the quay, every head in the crowded streets uncovered as he passed, you would not, I think, begrudge to our old hero the solace of a passage home.”

The plea was unanswerable. But, alas ! even the claims of the heroic veteran were of small account in the heart of Elisha Hildyard, compared with those of the gentle being who was as the life of his life !—

“But there is room in the steamer for others besides the General and his attendants,” he pleaded. “Surely, my dear Colonel, I and my family may be allowed a place on deck ? It is as easy for us to go round by Rotterdam as to make the passage of the Scheldt.”

"In that case, perhaps, it might be managed, if you can embark within an hour. I will speak to Prince Frederick. But the moment is not very propitious to obtain favours for English people. Our government is somewhat out of sorts at the non-intervention of yours, in the affairs of Belgium. As the kingdom of the United Netherlands was chiefly of its creation, we think you ought to assist in maintaining its integrity."

"His Royal Highness will surely not make me responsible," rejoined Hildyard, shrugging his shoulders, "for the measure of a sovereign scarcely yet known to his subjects by name?"

"Nor is he much better pleased," added the Colonel, "with the conduct of certain English residents in Brussels. Among others, my Lord Skewgill, who, on the strength of having served in Spain in the same regiment with the Prince of Orange, quartered himself on the royal family last winter; using their

table and stable much as if they were his own. The man (apparently a jovial, hearty fellow) was excused on the grounds of ignorance of our court etiquettes, and became a sort of favourite. Will you believe it—and will you not blush for your countryman, when I tell you—he was one of the first to take arms with the insurgents !”—

“I certainly see no reason why, even had he received no favours at the hands of the house of Orange, an English traveller should make it his business to resent the heavy taxation of their Belgian subjects,” said Hildyard, gravely. “Still,” he resumed, speaking in the Dutch language, with which his mother had from childhood rendered him familiar, “should Prince Frederick appear inclined to visit upon me the sins of Lord Skewgill, you must tell him, my dear Colonel, that both I and my invalid cousin are of Dutch descent. The lady for whom I plead is your uncle’s ward.”

“And the friend of Madame Adrian van

der Helde!" interrupted the A.D.C. "I have heard of her.—This affair must be instantly arranged. — Go back to the Saint Antoine.—Wait for me. — In half an hour, I will conduct you and the young lady on board."

Hildyard, who had begun to despair of success, did not wait for a second bidding. Having hastily prepared his companions and dispatched their baggage to the quay, he stationed himself them in a *vigilante* at the door of the hotel, ready for instant departure.

But, to her dismay, poor Nannie was required to quit her humble retreat in order to enter one of the royal carriages, with her cousin and Colonel Zelters. Prince Frederick, engaged in the Town-council and unable to take a personal leave of his revered General, had dispatched his senior aide-de-camp to pay that last respect to the dying veteran ; and on his way, Colonel Zelters profited by the royal sanction he had obtained to convey

Miss Balfour on board the Groot Brittanje.

"These are times which must excuse all sorts of informalities, mademoiselle," said he on their road to the river side. "At least, do me the justice to represent to my uncle that I rendered to his two wards the small services in my power."

Lucky for the weary invalid that Madame Duménil was at hand, to undertake the necessary ceremonies of politeness! The old lady was, in fact, now in her element. It was so many years since she had found herself in a carriage adorned with a *couronne fermée*!—All the mansuetude of courtly life seemed to return spontaneously to her lips in such a location.

Another agreeable surprise awaited her, when, after the forms of embarkation had been gone through, and suitable farewells bidden to the gallant A.D.C., a salute from the battery did honour to the departure of the

wounded General, so long the commandant of the garrison. She could have fancied herself back in the *Empire*! —“At that time,” she said, with a sigh resembling a nor'-wester, “the voice of a field-piece had become as music to her ear.” It was as much as the attendants of General Dopfers could accomplish to keep her from intruding into his cabin, and volunteering, in the character of a hero's widow, her services as nurse.

Hildyard meanwhile had caused a mattress to be placed on deck for his cousin, hoping she might efface by a few hours' sleep the fatigues of the previous day and night. Having barricaded her resting place, he placed himself in a chair by her side, to guard her slumbers from intrusion; and watching over her as she lay asleep, or at least silent and with closed eyes, that dreary passage of the Scheldt and Maes appeared to him as charming as the finest portions of the Rhine.—It was a genial afternoon, cloudless and serene; and

the joy of having rescued from danger one so dear to him, enhanced the attractions of the season and the scene.

On one occasion, when a band of military music, stationed near the water-gate of Dordrecht, having roused poor Nannie from her doze, and again, when a couple of herons rising suddenly out of the reeds at the passing of the steamer, flew over their heads, she laid her wasted hand upon his knee, in silent token of consciousness that a friend was watching over her ;—and seldom had he felt more happy !

They were not to reach Rotterdam till midnight ; and then, the necessity of coaling and receiving their letter of marque preparatory to the voyage to England, would detain them for some hours. When this was communicated to Miss Balfour, a new project suggested itself ; a project alone wanting to turn the head of the enraptured Madame Duménil. At first, indeed, cousin Ely was

reluctant and immovable. She wanted to proceed to the Hague, for a visit of a single day to her friend Clémence. But though the cost per diem at which the steamer was engaged was somewhat of the highest, her cousin could not refuse her the gratification of an interview with Madame van der Helde, to whom she was able to afford such interesting intelligence of her family.

There was the more reason for her desire to quit the steamer at once, because, alas ! on arriving at Rotterdam, it was but the dead body of the unfortunate General they had to consign to the officials and military, who, even at that late hour, crowded to the quay to welcome him. The painful ceremonies that ensued, were little suited to the nerves of an invalid. The sound of the muffled drums and wail of the trumpet, heard from a distance through the silent streets, overcame her.—A burst of tears signalised her first introduction to the land of her fathers.

Had the travellers been fated to arrive at the Hague early in the October of any other year, they would have found the city, which has been called the largest village in Europe, utterly deserted. But, thanks to the political crisis, the States-General were assembled, the Court was resident ; and thousands of persons, driven from Brussels by the revolutionary movement, crowded the place. Everywhere, animation ;—everywhere, movement.—

Though, contrary to Belgian belief, not an educated man throughout Holland (unconnected with the court or royal family) but was of opinion that the mother country would gain considerably by the dismemberment of the United Netherlands, the national pride was not a little ruffled by the defeat of their troops, and the rejection of the race of Nassau. Commerce, too, must suffer for a time. The finances of the country were temporarily disorganised. The private fortune of the king, chiefly invested in Belgian speculations, was seriously shaken.

There was every reason why old Lucas van der Helde, as sincere a patriot as ever breathed, should be somewhat depressed. The moment was unquestionably ill-chosen for the visit of the new comers.

Miss Balfour, being too much fatigued, on their arrival at the Hotel of the Doelen, to hasten, as she had proposed, to Clémence, Madame Duménil proceeded to announce her arrival; and renew her acquaintance with the kind friend from whom, during an absence of more than twenty years, she had received such liberal kindness. Time had done its work upon both. But Van der Helde had dwelt on the sunny side of the hill; the widow of the Imperial Colonel, on the bleak. The birth of a third grandchild was about to enlarge the domestic circle of the old man; while poor Madame Duménil was still a solitary wanderer.

And alas! the old lady brought tidings that grievously increased the sadness already clouding his brow under the pressure of pub-

lic calamity. General Dopfers was his old friend and schoolfellow; and he mourned for him as for a brother. With the family of his daughter-in-law, he was scarcely in charity. He blamed, like many others, the Prince de Courtrai and the Comte de Lanville, for having accepted the mission to Rome from a government they were prepared to overthrow whenever the occasion presented itself. Still, the danger of Léonce afflicted him. He only entreated that, in the critical state of Adrian's wife, the fate of her brother might not be allowed to transpire. Her husband being at that moment at Utrecht, the old man was careful that, neither letters nor newspapers from Belgium should reach her hands. But though the visit of the English travellers was manifestly untimely and unacceptable, he returned with Madame Duménil to the Doelen, to offer the hospitality of his house to the young representatives of a name which was to him as a household word.

Mitje Verhout, the first, and Mitje Verhout, the faithful servant who, year after year, had returned him half her salary, were objects of respect.—But, like most other solid families, the Van 'der Heldes had the art of creating faithful servants. Old Lucas still possessed several superannuated domestics, both at Utrecht and the Hague, who had passed half a century in the pay of his family. But these had never pretended to rise above their menial capacity ; — still, with feeble hands turned the spinning wheel, and still wore the national costume.

A vague idea, therefore, of the children of Madge and Dorthy pervaded his mind, as of a humble youth and maiden, risen a trifle above boorhood ;—and when he saw the well-bred, well-dressed, highly-educated young people whom his old servants had bequeathed to posterity, he felt not only surprised but almost injured.

Their deep mourning, however, and the

manifest delicacy of Miss Balfour's health, pleaded for them ; and, accosting them with formal kindness, he proposed taking them back with him to his house. Elisha, unacquainted with Mrs. Adrian, and unwilling to confer with the old man on the scenes they had lately witnessed, or the political grievances of Belgium, pleaded a desire to devote the few hours they were to remain at the Hague, to its gallery of exquisite pictures, and the "Wood" which constitutes its chief attraction. Miss Balfour, therefore, became his sole companion ; and her sweet face and gentle voice soon made him her friend. Of late, indeed, his English predilections had considerably subsided ; the iniquitous facts connected with the sale of the Hawkshill property still rankling in his memory. But the conciliatory manners of that fair and diffident girl almost redeemed them.

Happily for Nannie, Madame Duménil had prepared the way for her interview with Clémence, or the meeting might have been too

trying to both. Embracing her with all her heart, Madame van der Helde indulged in wild exclamations of admiration at her developed beauty, far exceeding those of Léonce on his first visit to the Strada della Longara.

But there ended the pleasure of the meeting. When Nannie found her totally unaware of the critical state of her brother, or even that her family had quitted the Ardennes, there was some difficulty in keeping up, without self-betrayal, the conversation. To describe the improved health of Sœur Véronique, and the attractions of little Eugénie, could not occupy the day; and when she endeavoured to fall back upon Rome as a topic, Clémence instantly brought her back to Belgium—"her own Belgium"—*cette bonne petite Belgique qu'elle aimait tant*, of which it was just then difficult to speak in Holland without giving offence. Adrian, she said, had just started for Utrecht, on family business, chiefly to avoid disagreeable arguments with

his father concerning the part taken by her brother in the recent negotiations.

“In short,” said Clémence, with her usual rash frankness, “it is not only the two kingdoms of the Netherlands, but half the families they contain, which are about to be dismembered. As in other cases of civil war, brothers have fought against brothers,—sons against fathers. Even the king and his son are at variance, concerning the concessions to be made; and both resent bitterly, against ourselves, the part taken by my family. For the future, I shall have a troubled time of it at the Hague!”—

There were many consolations, however, of which the powers of royalty were powerless to deprive her,—her two sturdy little boys, her happy home, and the warm affection of her old father-in-law. All his misgivings concerning his son's wife were now at rest. She had become a thrifty Dutch home-keeping housewife; the mother had proved a monitress to the wife.

Even Nannie was surprised to perceive how all the former flightiness of Clémence had subsided; and fully entered into the pride and love with which she displayed her handsome children and commodious house.

“And you, *chère petite sœur*!” said she, after having received the compliments due to her household treasures, “why have you nothing of this kind to exhibit? Past twenty, *ma Nani*, and not married! I was a wife at seventeen, as you would have been, had you accepted the hand of my brother. He was wild then, however, and you were right. But your foolish old *duègne*, who, I find, was the friend of Adrian’s poor mother, assures me you have just refused a peer of England fabulously rich—son to the man, by the way, who robbed us of Axil. Why is this? You have in England no Protestant convents. You cannot mean, like our poor Eugénie, to devote yourself to religion? In fact, you have no relations to benefit by such a sacrifice.”

Miss Balfour could scarcely refrain from a smile at this singular assignment of a motive for so solemn an act of resignation.

“And what is this cousin, my dear child, with whom you are travelling?” continued Madame van der Helde. “Donna Duménil informed me that he was a *savant* and a *nigaud*—words which she seems to think synonymous; and afterwards stumbled into some story of his having shown himself as perfect a hero as Roland the Brave; which, when further interrogated, she could not, or would not, explain.”

“Mr. Hildyard is my only surviving relative,” replied Nannie, evasively.

“Then he must be the cousin to whom Léonce always declared you to be troth plighted; by way of excuse, I fancy, for your insensibility to his own merits. But when are you to be united?”

“*Never!*” was Miss Balfour’s murmured reply. “My cousin is wedded to literary and

philosophical pursuits ; I, without retiring into a convent, Papist or Protestant, hope to devote my life to the good of my fellow-creatures."

"My dearest little sister!" cried Clémence van der Helde, somewhat out of patience ; "trust me, the good which a woman was born to accomplish, is to perfect the happiness of the lords of the creation, and perpetuate their race. All the rest, Nannie, is 'Vanitas, vanitatis.' As the mother of two fine little fellows like mine, or a pretty little fairy like Eugénie the Less, you would be a better woman and better Christian, than if receiving medals from Humane Societies, or testimonials and thanks from all the missionary meetings in the world."

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN cleaving the dull waters of the Maes the following day, with the pepper-box towers of Rotterdam receding in the distance, poor Nannie felt far more depressed than at the moment of quitting Antwerp. The poor little Groot Brittanje had since been the scene of so mournful an event! The atmosphere of Holland appeared so oppressive to herself and her cousin! Both agreed that their progenitors were fortunate to have been translated from the monotony of those flat pastures, and association with people out of whom all the poetry of life appears to have been expressed as

if by the weight of their own cheese-presses, even to the isolation of Hawkshill, or homeliness of Gridlands.

Perhaps, too, the sight of Madame van der Helde's household happiness, and blindness to the misfortune impending over her, tended somewhat to confirm poor Nannie's want of spirits. She, who in her childhood had so pitied poor neighbour Varnham's isolation in the world, was now beginning to compassionate herself on the same grounds. She was returning to her native country, after a year's absence, deprived of even the illusory affections she had carried away. She was returning to her native country, without the hope that her coming would gladden a single human heart. None to love her—none to joy with her—none to sorrow!—The Brents and her guardian cared for her as a helpless child. The cousin Ely, who, in absent mood, was now pacing the deck, or rather, the E. H., who was thoroughly involved in his own con-

templations,—who had once loved her, though only, perhaps, as his mother's niece,—evidently appreciated her unworthiness to share his present lofty aspirations.

Poor Nannie! How little did she understand the blindness of the rougher sex to such qualifications! How little did she surmise the superiority of a smile and temper as sweet and feminine as hers, to the strong-mindedness of a Harriet Brent, with her defiant brow and grotesque costumes!

When at length the little steamer, after battling nobly with the waves, attained the quiet waters of the Thames, and Nannie sat reflecting with contracted brow on the misery of approaching a busy, happy country, where she alone was purposeless and sad, her cousin suddenly resumed his place by her side.

"I am come to ask you," said he, "like a coachman at the end of a journey, (what I ought to have inquired long ago), where am I to drive you on our arrival?"—

Nannie was glad to have the question put in so cheerful a strain. To her, the subject had been one of mournful perplexity.

"I shall visit my guardian, at Stockwell, in the first instance," said she; "Gridlands next. For if Lord Garstang's report be exact, one stone will not long be allowed to rest upon another."

"And when the old house is razed?"—

"The sale can scarcely be effected within the year. Next summer, I shall be of age, and better qualified to decide upon my plans."

"And Madame Duménil?"

"Can remain with me till then. But when I pay my promised visit in Russell Square, I fear that she and our plain-spoken friend, Mrs. Brent, will soon be out of charity with each other."

"Likely enough. But, to borrow one of your poor father's proverbs, it will be, 'Bark Bawtie, and have dune wi't!' Mrs. Brent, though intolerant in most things, has too good

a heart to be hard upon one so poor and friendless. Particularly now, that she is herself rising so rapidly in the world. On the change of ministry, certain to follow the meeting of the new parliament, (which stands for the end of the month,) Brent is marked for judicial honours."

"And why does not E. H. write himself down M.P. in the new House?" inquired Nannie, almost alarmed at her own boldness.

"At the dissolution of the last, I was involved, after two idle years of leisure and study, in business arising from the death of my poor mother," he replied. "(' *Omnis vita humana otium est aut negotium*,' as Garstang and Barnett are always quoting.) And to say the truth, I am too vain, as well as too proud, to buy my way into parliament. Should the present fulfil its pledge of passing the Reform Bill, I may find my way to a seat on more honourable terms. But it is not of *my* pros-

pects, Nannie, I am here to talk to you—it is of yours. What I wish to explain—what I wish you to understand,”—he hesitated, and appeared more embarrassed than altogether became his initials, “is that, as I am henceforward to reside at my new house at Barlewell, the old cottage at Clifton will become vacant. I had thoughts of dismantling or letting it. But if, on the demolition of Gridlands, its climate were judged worthy to afford you the advantages you sought last winter in Italy, you would gratify me beyond measure by accepting the use of the place.”

Suitable acknowledgments were not difficult to make.

“He was aware,” she said, “of her predilection for a mild atmosphere, and picturesque neighbourhood. If, when the time arrived for him to quit the cottage, he were still willing to have her for a tenant, she should be grateful.”

“I have already left it,” said he. “I shall

probably never see it again. The house where my mother died must to me be always hateful!"

And Nannie who, a moment before, had been flattered by his proposal!—She remembered, however, how long ago he had made the same declaration to Mrs. Brent. Yes! she must accustom herself to his estrangement. She must learn to dispense with his society. But how difficult the task! "It is not till we endeavour to detach ourselves from a person," says St. Augustine,—and Pascal echoes the assertion,—“that we learn the strength of the tie that has united us. So long as we follow them unresistingly, the force of the attachment is unperceived.”

More than ever did she become conscious of this, when, having placed her under the safe guardianship of her friends at Greenhill Lodge, Hildyard took his hasty departure. That he had business of his own to attend to, that he was in haste to revisit his new resi-

dence, of which he had only just taken possession when Lord Garstang's letter summoned him to the rescue of his cousin, was probable enough. Yet, pressed as he was to stay, if only for a day, by old Zelters and his son, she considered his eagerness to be gone scarcely courteous. He took leave of her cheerfully, too; though avowedly with no project of seeing her again.

On the day following, came the reaction of all the excitement she had recently undergone. Scenes of danger, tumult, carnage; full of terror, yet full of interest. And all ending in a view of that gaudy, parti-coloured lawn, at Stockwell; and the monotonous family dinner of Zelters and Son!

Oh! the weary task of listening to the perpetual discussion of mercenary interests! It was a crisis of the highest importance to those whose investments and speculations were connected with the Low Countries; and poor old Jakes, who found himself, at the close of a

life of unremitting industry, considerably the worse for the state of the London Stock Exchange as well as that of Amsterdam, cared very little for the heroism of his nephew Fabian, or the danger of the wild young Count de Lanville. "Why could not the people of Belgium be content to pay their imposts, like reasonable beings, speak the wholesome Dutch language in place of flimsy French; and, instead of confiding in the fallacious promises of the new Theo-Democracy, entrust their lives and liberties to the paternal care of the longest-headed king that ever sat upon a throne: a man who might have officiated as managing clerk to Coutts and Co., or Baring Brothers, had he not been born Stadtholder of the United Provinces!"

Such was the eternal moan of Greenhill Lodge, varied by discussions with Nannie concerning the state of her Lancashire property, in which Jakes Zelters saw only the naked fact that the amount offered for it by

the new North-Western Company would increase her income by several hundreds a year ; whereas, by submitting her claims to a jury, she would probably lose as much in costs as could possibly be screwed out of a verdict.

Poor Nannie, whose thoughts were far away from the comparative advantages of railway or land investments, felt sick at heart whenever her good old guardian embarked in the question of finance. On arriving at Stockwell, she had rejoiced to find that Mrs. Whittingham was safe at Brighton ; so as to secure her from all allusion to the gossiping clique to which the banker's fashion-seeking wife had been the means of introducing her. But after a few days' quotations of the price of stocks and Dutch bonds, she would have been thankful for even Cordelia's simpering platitudes, to diversify their table-talk.

A different mode of enlivenment awaited her. Just as she had retired to her dressing-room on the fourth night of her sojourn at

Greenhill Lodge, to chew the cud of sweet and bitter fancies, in burst her "affectionate friend, H. Brent," whom she had understood to be passing the autumn with her family at Ramsgate; but who suddenly made her appearance at Stockwell, to ascertain, by personal observation, that her poor old father's health had not suffered as much as his fortunes, by the disturbances in the Low Countries.

To find the "little girl" established under his roof was a pleasure wholly unexpected.

"What is the meaning of all this?" cried she, after a survey of Nannie's pale face, set off in striking contrast by the fine dark hair streaming over her shoulders. "How dare you bring back from Italy such cheeks as these?—And what have you done, pray, with my son-in-law?"—

"Mr. Hildyard is gone back to Barlewell, to look after his flocks and herds, and carpenters," replied Miss Balfour, aware that to Mrs. Brent her answer must be as direct as the

inquiry. "My looks are owing to a low fever, and a harassing journey."

"Well, well, since you are come to be quiet among us, we will cure you as best we may. But I have risked so late an arrival, that I find my father and brother have already assumed their *casques-à-mèche* for the night. So grant me hospitality, and a glass of spring-water, while my room is preparing," she continued, taking possession of an arm-chair by the fire, and removing her bonnet. "Here I am, Nannie, just returned from Paris."

"From *Paris*?"

"For which, when talking to my father, you must read Ramsgate," said she, laughing. "I did not choose to increase his anxieties, just now when he has so many, by allowing him to know that Robert and I were risking ourselves in that plague-stricken city. But we could not rest without a glimpse of the citizen king, before the first bloom of his citizen

kinghood had worn off. It is a new character, child, in the history of nations, and worth studying."

"May it only content his mercurial subjects," said Miss Balfour, "and pacify a distracted country!"

"*That*, of course, is past praying for. Like the grumblers in the fable, the French already regret having exchanged King Log for King Stork. But their misdeeds and misfortunes have taught us one lesson,—that the tyranny of King Press is the worst tyranny of all! King Press can pull down, but cannot re-edify. King Press can blow the bellows of war, and even fight bravely in the *mêlée*. But, when the field is won, His inky Majesty shrinks into a corner to wash off the stains of the fray, and set up his types again; whereby his counsel is wanting. Look what a set of men they have allowed to gather round the new throne:—Broglie, Molé, Guizot—all *têtes à perruque*, who will encrust it with prejudices

as dangerous, in a contrary direction, as those which undermined the last."

"Has Mr. Brent, then, a bad opinion of the present state of affairs?"

"He is, at all events, thankful to it for having secured us against a Republic, for which the world will not be ripe for at least a century to come. Paris ought to reply to those who propose republican institutions (as the young English lady did to the Broadway dandy, who asked her to dance,) '*Monsieur, je ne parle pas Américain.*'"

"But you have been amused by your excursion?" inquired Nannie, to whom politics, from the lips of either Mrs. Brent or Lord Garstang, possessed far less interest than through the gentle interpretation of cousin Ely.

"Much amused. *Too well* amused. At least, Robert was often angry with me for laughing at things which, as indications, *he* considered miserably serious. For my part,

should another revolution occur in France, I believe the only resource will be to abrogate the Salique law, and place a woman on the throne. Think how the French would Koutou a Queen or Empress regnant!—If *that* did not revive the age of Chivalry, there are no Bayards in the world.”

“I would rather see revived the age of Faith. But tell me, dear Mrs. Brent, has the heir of the new dynasty any patriotic tendencies?—Is the present Duke of Orleans as shrewd as the last?”—

“I am inclined to say of you, as Frà Paolo did of the English royal Duke who beset him at Venice, ‘*Questo è un principe molto interrogativo.*’ But no matter what he is, if we are forced to add, ‘*Patre et avo friponibus.*’ Besides, of the last six sovereigns of France, not one has been succeeded by his son. But have you heard, my dear Nannie, that a new sovereign has been crowned in Europe?—An order in Council has been issued for

precautions against the Cholera ; which the Emperor of Russia has brought from the East, — a conquering, not a conquered enemy !” —

“ Your brother Wilhem, alas ! was reckoning it up, at dinner to-day, among the perils of the hour.”

“ I’m afraid the world is sadly out of repair. But better times are coming. We, who give refuge to banished kings, and lessons to our own, are likely to see our decks holystoned, and our tackle made taut, by William the Sailor. By the time Nina becomes your cousin, Nannie, by her marriage with E. H. (M.P.), we shall have, I humbly trust,—‘ on earth, Peace !—’ ”

“ I wish my cousin *did* write himself down M.P.,” said Miss Balfour, with a heavy sigh. “ No man is more capable of adding weight to the councils of the country. Where are we to find a purer or more exalted nature ?

—a man “whose armour,” as old Wotton sings,

“is his honest thought,
And simple truth his utmost skill.
Whose passions not his masters are,
Whose soul is still prepar’d for death :
Untied unto the world by care
Of public fame, or private breath.
Who hath his life from rumours freed,
Whose conscience is his strong retreat ;
Whose state can neither flatterers feed,
Nor ruin make oppressors great.
This man is——”

“Stop, stop, stop !” cried Mrs. Brent.
“Though the lines are admirable, and admirably recited, I had rather (as I am keeping up the old housekeeper) have the rest to-morrow morning.—In writing, too, please.—For, I promise you, I consider them quite as applicable to one Robert Brent as you do to a certain E. H. — But Nannie, Nannie ! I see there is no longer a chance for Nina.—You

and your cousin have at length travelled yourselves into love. No, no !—It is too late for protestations.—Good night — good night !”

CHAPTER V.

BEAUTIFUL Cliefden, "the bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love!" — *which*, among the green retreats adorning the environs of thy beautiful acclivity, is to be compared with Barlewell, the newly-erected residence of E. H. ?—

There was neither "favour nor prettiness" in its simple elevation ;—no fantastic Gothic or ornate Renaissance ;—neither gables, nor pepper-boxes, nor bartizans, nor Elizabethan windows ;—nothing that could have arrested the eye of a boarding-school miss in the Architectural-Design Room of the Royal Academy,—

nothing worthy to figure in the vignettes of Peacock's Polite Repository, or the flimsiest of fashionable annuals. But it was a thoroughly comfortable, stone-built residence; with the usual allotment of reception-rooms — viz., drawing and dining rooms, library and billiard-room; while the offices were so remarkably cared for, that a man like Sir Ralph Barnardiston would have suggested that the owner had evidently servants among his progenitors.

But the decayed old manor-house which it replaced, had been so thoroughly over-planted, and the timber dotting the adjoining paddocks was of so fine a growth, that the hatchet alone was wanting to clear the way to a thousand beautiful vistas; to say nothing of the landscape below, in which the tortuous course of the Thames, and the fine slopes of Cliefden, formed such beautiful features. The grey-haired Epicurean who then rejoiced in the possession of that charming seat, always en-

vied to Barlewell the enjoyment of Chieffen as an object.

To sites so precious as those on the banks of the Thames, large domains are seldom attached. Nor did the habits of young Hildyard render desirable the possession of a more considerable farm than supplied the wants of his household. But the house was approached by a plantation half a mile in length ;—an undergrowth of rhododendrons, studded with the finest old beech trees in the world.

As yet, the gardens of the old manor-house retained their pristine simplicity—viz., shrubberies of some extent, formed of choice evergreens ; with occasional openings of lawn, and rustic seats and alcoves, such as Shenstone and the last century rendered ridiculous by poetical inscription. For Elisha had little taste for fancy gardening. Nothing finical deteriorated his bachelor home.

Thither he now repaired, after two days spent in London, to hurry tardy upholsterers

and clear accounts with the skipper of the Groot Brittanje; and the sooty and noisy pur-lieus of the Barbican and St. Katherine's Docks were certainly calculated to enhance the charm of his tranquil groves, and the simple cleanliness of his bright chintz hangings. But that cheerful, lightsome house seemed more than ever to claim the crowning charm of female companionship; and the female companion from whom he had recently parted, seemed more than ever calculated to crown the attractions of a peaceful country home. — Alas! without the presence of Nannie, he felt that all was a blank!—

Dearly as he had loved her in her days of simple girlhood, he had not then anticipated she would ever become what the lessons of life had made her:—

A being breathing thoughtful breath—
A traveller betwixt life and death;
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill;

A perfect woman, nobly plann'd,
To warn, to comfort, and command ;
And yet, a spirit still, and bright
With something of an angel light !

And this spirit,—this angel,—this perfect woman,—was never, *never* to be his !—

Sometimes, he accused his own precipitation in having forced an answer to his suit three years before, of so peremptory a nature as to preclude its renewal. Had he waited till now, it was not impossible that the intelligence of Maurice Varnham's death might have afforded an opening for new impressions. If widows wed again, might not that young heart, so long estranged by absence from the object of its first attachment—an attachment arising far more out of interest for the mother than the son—have been propitiated, in wiser maturity, by the faithful devotion of his love?—

But why dwell upon it now ? All was over. His best course was to avoid her society, and

correspond with her as rarely as possible. But these good resolutions did not always prevail. Wherever he turned at Barlewell, Nannie was by his side ; seated with him in the lone alcove, and at every solitary meal. He would have put up with even the prattle of Madame Duménil, to have it so in earnest. — But *there*, she must never come.—It would drive him wild to behold the wife he had lost inhabiting that sunny drawing-room, which, with no prospect of her society, he had not courage to furnish.

At present, his deep mourning for his mother secured him from the intrusion of his country-neighbours—(that pest, unrivalled since the Egyptian plague of flies!)—for, absorbed in his own thoughts and occupations, the prosing of strangers would have been unsupportable. He endeavoured, indeed, to occupy himself in the arrangement of his library ; and, on pretence of wanting assistance in the task, entreated his friend William Barnett to forsake

his rooms at Oriel, and afford him a week's companionship in his new home.

Fortunately, the letter, though sealed, still lay unposted on his desk, when another, addressed to him in a queer, square, Italian hand-writing, was delivered to him, which determined him to postpone the invitation.

"Private and confidential," were the first words that met his eye. But the signature of H. B., said nothing to him; for he had reasons for knowing that it was not that of the H. B. of European renown. The eccentric mode of address soon enabled him to authenticate the writer.

"Dear Sir," it began, "or, if you allow me, I would willingly exchange the name for 'my dear friend.' I have earnestly to request of you to pay us a short visit at Greenhill Lodge. I write without the knowledge or sanction of your cousin, albeit she is the cause of my invitation. But she has so much delicacy of

feeling, that if aware of my intentions, I fear she would oppose her veto."

The recluse of Barlewell almost trembled. What could this mean? To what effect was Mrs. Brent about to interfere between him and his beloved? Dare he trust to his presentiments that she had been advocating his cause with his cousin?

"Your own sagacity will have suggested," continued H. B., "that the disordered public finances of the Netherlands must have seriously affected the firm of Zelters and Son. At my father's age, a crisis so unexpected is a terrible trial; and my brother has used his utmost endeavours to keep from the knowledge of the good old man as much as possible of their difficulties. My husband, indeed, after looking carefully through their accounts, is of opinion that they will weather the storm. But this must depend upon the prolongation of the commercial panic in Holland.

"Now, my dear Mr. Hildyard, the greater

part of the property of old Madam Verhout has been, for forty years past, invested in my father's house ;' and not till next year, on Nannie's coming of age, can it be withdrawn and divided. But even the savings of her father, which amounted to more than ten thousand pounds, were by his will entrusted to the firm. And thus, you see, the whole of this dear girl's property, with the exception of the Gridlands' estate, is jeopardised by this ruin-dealing Revolution !

"At any other moment, I should have advised my brother to place the state of the case before her ; as it ought to influence her decision concerning the sale of her lands. But, under all the circumstances, I cannot sanction such a step. Miss Balfour is in a most delicate state ;—out of spirits—out of health.—Every day appears to increase her weakness and dejection. I therefore venture to apply to *you*, dear E. H., to come hither and decide for her, as for yourself. To the judgment of

no other person in the world does she defer, as to yours. In the affection of no other person in the world does she confide, as in yours. Come, therefore, and confer with us in this grievous dilemma, where the health and feelings of an aged man and delicate girl are to be considered, and yet, their interests secured.—Above all, lose no time!

“Yours faithfully,

“H. B.”

And no time did he lose. If Imogen's prayer for “a horse with wings to bear her on his back to Milford Haven,” were ever echoed, it was by E. H. But the *dormeuse*, endeared by having served poor Nannie in her flight from Lanville, aided by active post horses, served as well. To himself, indeed, the road and the journey appeared interminable. Had he indulged in soliloquy, and for once talked nonsense, he might have exclaimed in all truth, with Rosalind, “O coz, coz, coz, my

pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathoms deep I am in love!"

He was at Stockwell long before he was expected by Mrs. Brent. To his cousin, his coming was indeed a surprise. But, without adverting to the embarrassments of Zelters and Son, it was easy to place his unexpected visit to the account of negotiations arising out of the sale of Gridlands. To have it explained at all, was no object to Miss Balfour. He was there again, and that was enough. Even Madame Duménil clasped her hands for joy when she heard that the man whom she never named otherwise than as "*son libérateur*," was come back to meet "*cette folle de Madame Brent*."

To every one, his arrival appeared to afford delight. The cheeks of poor Nannie glowed with feverish crimson. The unelastic Wilhem felt as if a load of paving stones were removed from his mind. Even H. B., albeit unused to bow to external influences, was relieved at

being no longer compelled to play a part of excellent dissembling and false gaiety, as on the night of her arrival at Greenhill Lodge.

Before breakfast, next morning, though a brisk autumnal breeze was blowing, H. B. was wandering with E. H. on the adjacent Common; the only way of escaping the espionage of the gardener of genius and his myrmidons, and getting out of sight of those still closed windows of Nannie's room which pre-occupied the attention of her cousin.

"But why infer," pleaded he, "that Nannie is more amenable to *my* opinion than that of others?—She has so many friends!"

"Friends, enough, and to spare. But only one kinsman,—one cousin,—one E. H.,—one lover,—one beloved."

Elisha Hildyard felt his heart leap within him.

"You are surely not aware," said he, faintly, "that Miss Balfour has positively denied me the

only title under which I could usurp the management of her affairs?—”

“Perfectly aware. But it was three years ago. I will not degrade my sex by pleading the *varium et mutabile* to account for her altered feelings. But the very tenour of her life has changed. Death, that great stage manager, has swept away both the scenes and *dramatis personæ*.—Is the human heart, Mr. Hildyard, to be alone immutable?”

“You would not, I think, trifle with me,” he resumed, after a moment’s pause. “You cannot wish to give me unnecessary pain. Have I—have I now a chance of obtaining the hand of my cousin?”—

“No chance!—A dead certainty, whenever you choose to ask for it!—I have been wondering for the last two days whether I shall ever see my own little daughter as desperately in love,—as her dear Nannie.”

Without waiting for another word, Hildyard darted off towards the house, leaving H. B.

planted somewhat goose-wise on the Common. But the recollection of those closed window-shutters soon brought him back again.

"God bless your indiscretion, my dear Mrs. Brent," cried he, almost hysterically. "God bless your indiscretion!—It is not for *me* to find fault with it! But there is one secret which I fervently and earnestly entreat you to keep.—Not a word to Nannie concerning the insolvency of Zelters and Son. Her disinterested, generous nature would perhaps recoil from the idea of accepting, dowerless, the man she refused when rich. There must not be a single drawback on our happiness—on our love."

"But were the worst to happen, my dear sir, which heaven avert, you would yourself be a considerable loser?"

"My father's property produces about three thousand a-year. Should my grandmother's ever be restored to us, we must treat it as a godsend."

"More than enough for every purpose of

happiness," cried the warm-hearted H. B. "So go on, and prosper. I will not sit down with you to-day at dinner, unless I have been previously asked for my congratulations."

With more tact than might have been expected from her, she managed to carry off Madame Duménil to London, to spend the morning in shopping; and when at length Miss Balfour stole down to breakfast, she found her cousin in solitary possession of house, garden, conservatory. There was no escape. Leaning against that very pillar where, a year before, she had watched, with Mrs. Brent, the flowering of the *Cereus*, she was compelled to hear a tale of love as true and touching as was related to the fair Genevieve in the ruined tower. Let us not suppose that she was more obdurate. Let us trust that

She listened with a flitting blush,

With downcast eyes and modest grace;
And she forgave him that he gazed
Too fondly on her face.

By the time Zelters and Company drove back into the courtyard, just before the ringing of the first dinner-bell, the cousins were ensconced almost conjugally, by the fireside ; discussing the hangings and furniture to be placed immediately on the stocks for the cheerful drawing-room at Barlewell !—

Surrounded by kind friends, all obstacles removed, no foolish demurs on either side retarded the solemnization of their marriage. They no longer ventured to trifle with their chances of happiness. Their mourning was to be laid aside for a day ; and, without pomp or pretence,—no Bishop, no Brussels lace, no orange-flowers, no wedding favours,—the happy cousins became man and wife.

William Barnett officiated as best man ; pretty little Nina Brent as bridesmaid. Wilhelm Zelters, who gave away the bride, was certainly a little out of spirits ; Mrs. Brent, *mirabile dictu*, in tears ! But these she laugh-

ingly ascribed to the loss of her intended son-in-law.

As Madame Duménil, liberally remunerated for her services, had stolen back to Paris, where the ragged remnant of the *Empire* was looking up, poor old Jakes Zelters had no longer an auditress to whom to persevere in his assertion that Greenhill Lodge was a paradise on earth. But his infatuation had now a rival. The happy couple who had recently received his fatherly benediction, were not a whit less persuaded that the only Eden extant in this world was situated on the banks of the Thames, and that its name was Barlewell.

CHAPTER VI.

WITH the aid of the seven-leagued boots of the reader's imagination, let us at once overstep seven years, and alight on the threshold of a new reign. Let us suppose Queen Victoria on the throne; the waters of strife subsiding throughout Europe; and a halcyon brooding on the waves. Let us suppose Parliament reformed;—railroads established;—new kingdoms consolidated in Belgium and Greece;—the cholera suppressed;—and the wide, wide world at peace.

Parliament seldom lives out the allotted age of parliaments. They generally die in some teething convulsion. Were it otherwise, and

they were forced, in their last moments, to render an account of the events of their life, what changes of opinion, what revulsions and revolutions, would they not have to recount ; all subsiding at last into the ever-flowing stream of Time, whose eternal current reduces human beings and sublunary events to insignificance, like whin-bushes on the shores of Niagara.

Of the transitions it falls to our lot at present to describe, let us commence with localities. Gridlands—nay, the whole hamlet of Middledale—had disappeared. A railway in full activity traversed the Dale ; a portion of the land bought from the Hildyards, for the purpose of its creation, having been repurchased by an Illington speculator, for a row of small but regular domiciles, in substitution of the demolished hovels. All the worse for the picturesque ; all the better for the quarriers by whom they were inhabited.

The chief improvement of the place con-

sists of a decent church, erected by the new Lord Mardyke; so little removed from the site of the old, however, that the green graveyard is still consecrated by its proximity. Within its new stone fence a granite sarcophagus commemorates the life and death of Michael and Madge Balfour of that parish; and on the opposite face, of Martha Rudge-well, for forty years their faithful servant; while handsome headstones record the pastorate of the Rev. David Hurdis, and the patient virtues of Alice Varnham; all these memorials being the parting bequests of Mrs. Hildyard to her birth-place.

Not a brick remains of Martha Rudge-well's dairy,—not a stake of Dorcas Hubbersty's sheep-pen. But is not the Windsor Cottage also demolished?—Does the place of Carlton House know it any longer?—

The firm in the Barbican, too, was gone. Not by bankruptcy; for it had battled man-

fully with the crisis, and not only fulfilled all its obligations, but the venerable Jakes—who was also lying under a sarcophagus—in his case, not of granite, but marble—a considerable ornament to the Stockwell cemetery, as viewed from the London road, and affording instructive reading to the Sunday-school on its way to catechism, — died immensely rich. Wilhem, after comforting himself for the loss of Nannie, by marrying the wealthy widow of one of his correspondents at Amsterdam, had transferred the leisure of his future life to that amphibious city.

His two sisters were ladyships! But it was “with a difference:” Lady Whittingham being the wife of a knighted sheriff, an assiduous Pavilion courtier; Lady Brent of one of the highest officials of the law, already marked for a peerage. The Whittinghams were established in Belgravia, now the courtly quarter of the town; while the Brents had migrated from the sobrieties of Russell Square

to what is called an "eligible situation;" *i.e.* a situation where great men could eat their great dinners without fatigue to their horses.

For even in the fashionable world, Sir Robert and Lady Brent were now personages. The eccentric lady, though somewhat tamed down by her honours, still occasionally frightened the great world from its propriety by egregious dresses; appearing one night in a Titianesque costume, and the night following *à la* Queen Katherine, at the will and pleasure of some romantic lady's-maid or fanciful modiste. Her opinions too, were as pronounced, and her language nearly as strong as ever; and poor Lady Whittingham trembled, on her sister's first appearance (at five-and-thirty) in the conventionalised mob of fashion, whose criticism she was so likely to provoke.

But her tremors were superfluous. High rank and great opulence sometimes fail in procuring indulgence for the frailties of their

possessors. But real genius is so pregnant a gift, that it is amazing what lengths a party will go in supporting a man, or even his wife, whose abilities and eloquence are calculated to keep them in office. Both Whigs and Conservatives have pardoned offences of taste far more flagrant than Lady Brent's extraordinary head-dresses, in favour of a learned Lord Chancellor, or able Master of the Rolls.

As Lord Brougham has wisely observed : "The most important department in every state, is the administration of justice ;" and Sir Robert Brent was universally pointed out, in the professional and political world, as the first lawyer in the kingdom.

In addition, however, to his influence as a leading public man, Sir Robert Brent was supported by a host of attached friends. His house was one of the pleasantest in London ; a gathering-place for able men of all sides and opinions ; writers, who knew how to talk ; talkers, qualified to write ; ingenious triflers,

logical arguers ; people who came to share or enhance the social enjoyment of the party ; not to dazzle in insolent, solitary lustre, like the V. R. of an illumination.

A humbler—but not a humble—position in London life was occupied by the Hildyards ; and, but for the parliamentary duties of her husband, Nannie would have altogether disclaimed a residence in the metropolis. It was not her world. She was too happy and contented at home to risk collisions with the elbowing, trampling throng. But since E. H. must, of necessity, spend six days of the week during six months of the year, under the canopy of smoke which overclouds the busiest city in Europe, she installed herself cheerfully in a nutshell in Spring Gardens overlooking the Park ; which satisfied all their ambition, but did not enable them to receive at their table more than six guests at a time.

Among these, one of the most frequent was the Earl of Mardyke ; no longer the talking-

at-random, or talking-for-effect Lord Garstang; but a grave, deliberative member of the Upper House—conscious that his opinions were of moment to the country, and fancying them of six times the moment they really were.

The most genuine sentiment of his heart, perhaps, was his affection for E. H., before whom he succumbed, yet without envy, as to a superior being. Otherwise, he would not so readily have forgiven Mrs. Hildyard for preferring her cousin to an Earldom and thirty thousand a year, with himself thrown into the bargain.

It was, perhaps, because he appreciated the indulgence and tolerance as well as greatness of Hildyard's mind, that he felt more at ease in his company than among others of his former associates; who accused him of having moulted his borrowed plumes of Liberalism in the vestibule of the House of Lords. The Earl himself indeed frankly avowed his satisfaction that the Reform Bill had passed du-

ring his father's lifetime ; as he could not answer for having renounced without a struggle the two boroughs which for a century past had done their part in aggrandising his race. And though the pheasants and hares had been shot down at Mardyke and Hawkshill, in order that poachers might *not*, and though the peasantry was in process of education on his property instead of pointers and setters, he was accused of screwing his tenants, and affording inadequate support to county institutions. As in most other instances, the Prince of Wales had forfeited his popularity on ascending the throne.

Sir Robert Brent, who was no respecter of persons, though he liked Lord Mardyke well enough as an ingredient in a large party, systematically avoided him in a small one, as prosy and dogmatic ; venting, in social life, the dry rationalism which is best reserved for the study. The learned judge was himself one of the pleasantest, easiest, and cheer-

iest of table-companions ; and it did not surprise him, as he sometimes whispered to Hildyard, to see Mardyke surround himself with literary toadies and jobbers ; “ he required such *very* long ears to listen to his *very* long dissertations.”

“ He’s too fond of being a Triton among the minnows,” observing the unsparing lawyer to E. H. “ I see him sometimes at the Athenæum, dining with that noisy little chatter-box, Progget the pamphleteer.”

“ What is he to do, if the Sir Robert Brents refuse to meet him ?” pleaded Hildyard, smiling. “ And Progget, small as he is, has been the Seyd of more than one Mahomet.”

“ Don’t you know why ? Though Progget has not a grain of original wit, his memory is prodigious. His recollections afford him the ready money which others derive from their understanding ; for people who want to promulgate an opinion, or a bon-mot, tell it to Progget. It is sure to be echoed in thirty or

forty visits a day, and contributed to the pool of a couple of clubs. The little man lives upon tale-bearing ; unless when, as in Garstang's case, he is able to convert his farthings into half-crowns. Garstang once said to me, 'When I want to circulate base coin, I pay it away to Progget.' "

"If he said anything so treacherous, my dear Brent, don't repeat it ; for I fully expect to see, sooner or later, dear little Nina become Countess of Mardyke."

"Nina ?" exclaimed Sir Robert, suddenly sobered into seriousness. "God forbid ! That would never do. Lord Mardyke is too old for my girl, and a great deal too sententious. Nina is the merriest little bird in the world ; the delight and comfort of our lives. Neither Harriet nor I could bear to lose her. And a great match of that description would *be* to lose her ! Besides, she would not be happy. She was not born for those frozen altitudes. Few plants blossom on Mont Blanc ;

few song-birds sing. — No, no, Hildyard ! Leave us our little linnet, to be the joy of our happy valley.”

E. H. could not altogether second his objections ; perhaps, because better acquainted than the great lawyer with the qualities of Lord Mardyke. He was a man who, once seriously attached, was likely to become the slave of his wife.

Nor, though he dearly loved Nina Brent, could he enter into the passionate love of her parents ; for alas ! his own marriage was childless. Both he and his wife were reconciled to the privation. Nannie fancied that, had children played by their hearthside, her husband would have been too much pre-occupied by their welfare to devote himself to his public duties ; while her husband decided that Nannie, if absorbed in maternal duties, would have shorn the wings of her conjugal enthusiasm. She was less prepared than other women for the cares and pleasures of a nur-

sery. Reared without brother or sister, among elderly people, her heart had from childhood derived its chief happiness from friendship; and she was still, as ever, the warmest and most devoted of friends.

Nina Brent, however, she loved quite as much for her own sake, as for that of her father or mother; and it would have been difficult to do less, for, from Mrs. Hildyard's arrival at Stockwell, eight years before, she had been an idol to her. But in that interval, the intelligent little girl of twelve had progressed into a beautiful young woman; endowed with all her mother's beauty, all her father's sagacity.

Twice had Lady Brent, herself confined to London by Sir Robert's official duties, (to say nothing of the claims of an elder son studying for the bar, and a younger, in the Guards,) permitted her dear Nina to accompany the Hildyards to the continent; to the Hague, to become the guest of her grandfather's friends

the Van der Heldes; where she made acquaintance with her cousin Fabian,—now a brigadier-general, whose cocoa-nut fibred mustachios were extensive enough to furnish matting (if manufactured by Treloar) for a roomy vestibule; and more recently, to spend a fortnight at the old chateau of Lanville-sur-Lesse; realising the scenes of certain romantic adventures previously recounted by Mrs. Hildyard.—But more than all, she was often with them at Barlewell; deriving the best of lessons from the spectacle of rational happiness and duties fulfilled. Sir Robert always protested that his darling Nina came back to him from these visits, redeemed by a host of feminine virtues from the ill effects of a season of fashionable fêtes; where her beauty and wit rendered her a far greater object of attraction than is good for woman or girl.

Her brother Arthur, the Guardsman, who, like the rest of her family, doated upon Nina,

was the only person who ventured to disapprove of these visits, which he said "took all the 'chaff' out of Neeny; and chaff as good as hers," he added, "was as hard to come by as a pug dog, a Queen Anne's farthing, or a golden pippin."

For Arthur, who had not yet cast the skin of his Etonianism, readily perceived that the Hildyards wanted to marry his sister to Lord Mardyke: "And a man who is too good a Christian to preserve his manors," he observed, "was no brother-in-law for Arthur Brent."

Even Bob the barrister regarded the new Earl as a somewhat solemn institution; always receiving deputations from his tenants, and advertising them in the papers. "One would fancy," quoth Bob, "that his lordship needed a certificate of his principles, such as a skipper asks of his passengers after a long sea-voyage, concerning his provisions."

"Our pretty Neeny is far too lively a bird

to mate with so grave a fowl!" rejoined Arthur. "And then, my mother is always borrowing wisdom, at high interest, from Hildyard and Co. !—On account of some slight formerly offered to Mrs. E. H., she won't hear of the *déjeuners dansants* of Aunt Whittingham's friend, Mrs. Warburton Wast Warburton, and there are so few breakfasts to be had for love, or money, or manœuvring, that lilacs and laburnums are at a premium."

"I suppose *you* can go if you think proper?"

"And then there is that Sir Ralph Barnardiston," added Arthur, who had not half done with the Hildyards: "the man who is come over from the King of Hanover, with a Guelphic riband and a Mission, which no one understands (unless it be to rub out with silver-rubber from the Hartz, the old scores of the Duke of Cumberland). My father omitted him the other day in his grand diplomatic Barlewell dinner, because he formerly spat fire at my mother's friend."

“Well, we mustn’t let these people take the cheerfulness out of our excellent governor,” said Bob, “for, as Juvenal says,

Rari quippe boni : numero vix sunt totidem,
quot

Thebarum portæ, vel divitis ostia Nili.

We are told that the laugh of an honest man is the song of his conscience ; and *his* must not be silenced.”

“No, certainly,” retorted his brother, in a classical dialect of his own. “We can’t afford to have him muddled with milk and water, or converted into a muff like the rest of those æsthetic impostors in Spring Gardens. Though, with Bon Gualtier,

Within my nether soul convinced I am
Philosophy’s as good as any other bam,

I vote that we bowl down the Hildyards.”

The career of Sir Ralph since his “exit hastily” from Rome, in company with the

Stodarts, must not, however, be so slightly passed over. On arriving with them in Manchester, he was at first hailed with the interest usually exhibited in provincial towns, and even cities, towards titled strangers. The Stodarts, as eyewitnesses of the recent revolution, were received, not only open-armed, but open-eyed and open-mouthed, by their untravelled friends; and their peculiarly dinneriferous natal city turned out all its plate-chests and china-closets, and set all its stoves at work, to do honour to the young couple. To these feasts, Sir Ralph accompanied them, as an interpreter accompanies Oriental princes when they dine with the Lord Mayor; and, thanks to his well-padded coat and turgid phraseology, his presumption was for a time mistaken for authority, and his rigmarole for eloquence. But in the long run, good sense prevails. The men of Manchester soon discovered him to be a bubble. They could manufacture a better rhetorician out of elder-pith. Instead of having officiated

as ambassador to half the crowned heads in Europe, as his self-consequence had led them to imagine, they detected him as an impostor, —the Maugrabin of William de la Marck, arrayed in a herald's tabard!—

If the whole truth must be told, a suspicion of his want of means had its share in discrediting his talents. For Manchester, though abounding in strong-minded men, is too apt to estimate people by the amount of their income-tax. —Sordid calculation clings to their personal estimates, like the piece of gold to the bottom of Cogia Hassan's measure.—

On finding himself, therefore, gradually omitted from the invitations given to the Stodarts, he anticipated his coming downfall by receiving an urgent letter from Brighton, and hastening to take up his abode there in a fashionable hotel. When spunging in early life on a Scotch aunt, Lady Virginia Barnardiston, who had progressed from a place in

the household of Queen Charlotte to a retiring crib in Hampton Court Palace, he had been slightly noticed by the Duke of Clarence, and been occasionally invited to the balls at Bushy Park: which sufficed to enrol him among the eight or ten thousand individuals who now pretended to the patronage of William IV. Established at the Albion, His Majesty could scarcely pass the Pavilion gates without obtaining a glimpse of the uncovered head of his new courtier.

The scheme had not succeeded. Sir Ralph Barnardiston's sinecure-hunt had proved as infructuous as his *πριγκίπων* mission at Brussels; and when the death of the Sailor King sealed the doom of Pavilion courtiership and left the old Baronet stranded on the Brighton shingles, he began to polish up his German, instead of his boots; and, as soon as the new King of Hanover had been sufficiently long domiciled at Herrenhausen to become hungry for English gossip, pocketed his many affronts,

packed up his carpet-bag, and departed for Hanover.

His return and its motives have been sufficiently enlarged upon by the beardless censor of the Grenadier Guards.

CHAPTER VII.

CONTRARY to Arthur's suppositions, not a syllable of disparagement had been urged by the Hildyards against the pretensions of either Sir Ralph or the W. W. W.s. But Sir Robert Brent, having met them at dinner at his brother-in-law, Sir James Whittingham's, decided that people whose consequence was to be measured by the rule of three—surnames, were thrice to many for him.

Their new accession of name, however, had been forced upon them. The nickname of 'Wasp,' which they had acquired by Roman misalment, stuck to them so injuriously on

their return home, that Mr. W. W. considered five hundred pounds a cheap purchase for the resumption of his patronymic of Warburton, of which family he was really the head ; when, lo ! his foolish wife, unwilling to re-paint her hall chairs, or re-mould her plate by renouncing one of her crests, left her card as "Mrs. Warburton Wast Warburton," with the intention of dropping, at some future time, an intermediate name which, like the lady's in the popular ballad, was never more to be mentioned.

Even this did not secure their toleration in fashionable life. Four uninteresting individuals, of no particular family, fortune, or personal attractions, are not easily smuggled into society, in a city whose reception-rooms resemble in dimensions the pens in the ark ; and Mr. and Mrs. and the Misses W. W. W. were still voted superfluous by givers of balls ; when some good genius whispered to the Begum to exchange her mansion in Eaton

Square for a villa on the Thames, called "The Aspens," with the view of giving weekly breakfasts throughout the summer.

Before a month was over, the W. W. W.s were at a premium ! There comes a crisis of the London season, when fine ladies want to wear out the *paille de riz* bonnets for which Ascot has proved too rainy ; and *déjeuners* afford a safer and more economical resource than Greenwich or Richmond dinners, or cruises in the cockle-shells called Thames yachts. There were only four miles of market-gardens to traverse, in order to reach "The Aspens ;" and the blush of belles and roses, Lifeguardsmen and acacias, at the opening of this private Cremorne, proved far more successful than the most sanguine hopes of the treble W.s had anticipated. Little Progger wrote a very diminutive lyric on the occasion, which crept into a corner of the Morning Leger ; and though it was denounced by Bob Brent as "Catullus and treacle," and by his

brother the Etonian, as "Tom Moore diluted with small beer," this mawkish libation freshened the dusty laurels of the villa.

Lady Whittingham, too, brought out a daughter on the occasion; whose fleece of flaxen hair glistening in the sunshine, looked as if it had been carded into liquid gold, in Marshall's flax mill.

"But why not allow poor Nina the enjoyment of so gay a fête?" inquired Mrs. Hildyard of her "affectionate friend H. Brent"—(though fated not long to remain so)—who had made her way into the little morning room in Spring Gardens, where Nannie, mounted on a platform, was occupied in painting one of the twelve panels which she had undertaken to fill with portraits of English worthies. For already, by Manchester teaching, an excellent draughtswoman, she had acquired, during her six months' sojourn in Rome, considerable proficiency in oil-painting.

"Because the poor girl has enough and to

spare of fêtes. Her father cannot bear her to be fatigued by too much raking. Again, breakfasts afford so much latitude for forming and improving promiscuous acquaintance ; and Arthur introduces partners to his sister by the hundred, as carelessly as though calling over the muster-roll of his regiment.—There is a Lord Lewis Crawford, the younger son of some Scotch duke, a young diplomat at home on leave—(who might, I should think, render his leave of absence permanent, without much injury to the country)—who never quits her side.”

“I remember seeing him at Rome, where, from his dilatory habits, he was called the *late* Lord Lewis Crawford.”

“Then, there is that handsome Lord Rathonan, whom I particularly dislike ; but towards whom, I fear, Nina feels more kindly.”

“Another friend of Arthur’s?”

“No ; her father made his acquaintance at the Academy dinner.”

"Nina should have decided more expeditiously between so many noble suitors," said Nannie, gaily ; "and secured a peeress's robes at the approaching coronation—"

"For which, she would have cared as little as I for mine, which are already making. Next Saturday's Gazette, dear Nannie, will announce my husband's elevation to the peerage, as Lord Lemoyne."

"I heard, when he kissed hands the other day on his new appointment, that this was to be."

"Yes, and *inevitably*. To have refused, they say, would have afforded a precedent injurious to the ambitions of his brethren of the wig. Robert, however, does not consider his fortune adequate to a peerage ; though, for the last fifteen years, we have laid by half our income, to say nothing of the fifty thousand pounds left me by my father."

"Your eldest son will create a fortune for himself," rejoined her friend. "Hildyard con-

siders him a young man of first-rate abilities."

"I would rather hear him called a plodding lawyer.—But to return to our coronet (and bells). Robert is one of those who would fain place himself and his coadjutors on the same footing as the Scotch Lords of Session, as peers for life. Landless lords form a sorry addition to the aristocracy; and we may have, some day or other, to build a Noble Union, as a supplement to the Upper House."

"*That*, thank God! can never regard either you or yours, dearest Harriet," said Mrs. Hildyard. "And considering the talents and character by which your honours have been won, methinks you cannot wear them too proudly."

"The pride of the case is safe with the junior members of the family. Ensign the Honourable Arthur, I suspect, will make up for all my deficiencies. But tell me, Nannie, is it true that the Lanvilles accompany the

Prince de Ligne to England, for the coronation?"

"Quite true. And the Van der Heldes, and their boisterous boys, are to be our guests. General Zelters, too, I find, is attached to the suite of Baron von Capellen. All the world seems disposed to congregate in London for the great event."

"And after the great event?—For even the brightest day must have a morrow."

"The Lanvilles and Van der Heldes will accompany us to Barlewell, for a little country quiet. Flowers and green fields will probably be refreshing, after the blaze of stars and garters."

"A welcome meeting for the brother and sister, whose country has been split in twain, like the two halves of an apple! But will they be gone, Nannie, when we fulfil our engagement to spend with you the twenty-third of July?"

"I hope not. Our lord-lieutenant is to give

a splendid entertainment, at Wickham Court, to the Duc de Dalmatie ; against whom, thirty years ago, he served under the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsula ; and I should like them to be present. I expect Nina, too, to be one of the chief ornaments of the fête."

"But *you* never go to these things?"—

"You will be there to chaperon her. Our invitation extends to friends who may be staying at Barlewell. Between ourselves, though the Wickhams are politeness itself when we meet, it is a great relief to them that we seldom cross their threshold. His Lordship is a Tory of the old school, who despises us as *parvenus*, and loathes us as Radicals ; but, thanks to the deference shown in London to my husband by ministers, and even the leaders of his own party, he is forced to be civil. The other night, when he met us going out of the Opera, it was amusing to see the contest between his natural good

breeding and his dread of being seen in our company."

"You and Hildyard are too sensitive to encounter the rubs of what is called the world!" observed H. B., who was watching, with admiration, the delicate strokes of Nannie's pencil, just then employed in delineating the striking features of Algernon Sidney. "But after all, you lose nothing by shunning large assemblies. All that is best worth knowing in London, dines you and dines *with* you. The rest is hubbub and vexation of spirit."

"Say rather an insipid waste of time," said her friend. "On settling in town, five years ago, I was for a time dazzled and enchanted by the brilliancy of the scene; the superior tone of conversation, the affluence and variety of wit and knowledge. Everybody seemed to understand everything;—everybody to know everybody:—their tongues and pens ever-pointed; their mirth always effervescent. But I soon found that what sounded

at first so brilliant, was mere jargon that tickled my inexperienced ear ; that what sounded like knowledge, was simply plausible assertion. This everlasting flow of talk proved, like the water supplied so copiously to every house, to be tepid and vapid in the long run !—A single wholesome sparkling country well, is worth millions of such reservoirs."

"Wholesomer drink, at all events ; for the millions of reservoirs are not only vapid and tepid, but noxious. Robert Brent maintains that the present age is more moral than the last. I don't believe it. Some centuries sin in practice—some in principle. I believe there never was a time when, however fair the surface, the morals of the higher classes were so corrupt. One species of trees perishes at the core,—another by the bark.—But, depend upon it, English society is experiencing the twofold decay."

"The very reason," said Nannie, stopping

suddenly in her work, "why Hildyard and I are so desirous to see Nina show some little interest in Lord Mardyke! He may be a little too grave for her present age. But what a companion for her as she advances in life; all his aims honourable—all his purposes exalted."

"What signify his aims or purposes if he be a bore? A *pleasant* companion, Nannie, is quite as necessary as a distinguished one."

"But she will render him pleasant. Already, since he has known her, he has become ten years younger. You saw him first under the sudden pressure of a heavy load of family consequence."

"He certainly endures better than he used, the chaff of the boys. Arthur can never be persuaded to treat him as anything but a butt."

"So much the better. It is just what he wants. Lord Mardyke is accustomed to be

too deferentially listened to; which is sure to make people prosy and pompous."

"It is a difficult matter to deprive a man, let alone a lord, of his specific gravity. But Lord Lewis Crawford, with half his cousin's abilities, is far lighter in hand."

"*La cigale et la fourmi!* But the *fourmi* is surely better company for the winter of life!"

"*Apropos de cigales*, my dear Nannie, I forgot to tell you that my brother Wilhem, in his last letter, announced that poor dear Madame Duménil has chirruped her last. Though rendered comfortable, he says, by the liberal provision you had assigned her, the innate restlessness of the *intrigante* prevailed. She got involved in that wretched affair at Strasburg; and, no longer safe in France, was about to take shelter with the Van der Heldes at the Hague, when death provided her with a permanent home."

"Do not say the restlessness of an *intri-*

gante," interposed Mrs. Hildyard. "Her devotion to the Bonaparte family was quite as warm a feeling as the loyalty of which we are so proud. Even as children, she adored Louis Napoleon and his brother. The death of the elder, at Forli, was a heavy blow to her; the defeat of the younger, at Strasburg, was, I doubt not, the cause of her death. She always fancied that *he* was to redeem the honour of his house. Poor old lady! She was the innocent cause of much annoyance to me; but she was, by nature, as harmless as she was flighty."

"Simply one of the gauzy-winged ephemera called into life by the unnatural atmosphere of Napoleon's court. But hark!" cried she, interrupting herself, for the sound of her children's voices in the distance had caught her ear. "Here are Nina and her brother, come to remind me that there is such a thing as a dinner-hour in the twenty-four."

Miss Brent and Arthur were, indeed, on

horseback, at the door. Returning from their daily ride, they had dropped Sir Robert at the House of Commons ; and were now in search of the parent to whose visits Mrs. Hildyard's unfashionable hours (for, during the session, Nannie always took an early dinner with her husband) afforded so much latitude.

Thanks to their judicious intrusion, the noble brow of Algernon Sidney received its finishing touches ; and Nannie was left to meditate on the chequered tidings of good and evil, she had heard from the future Lady Lemoyne.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN untimely dinner was no great sacrifice, on the part of Mrs. Hildyard, to the comfort of the best of husbands. But to a woman so devoted to the pleasures of a country life, it cost many a pang, when, gazing from her windows on the sooty foliage and herbage of St. James's Park, or even on the dwindled overforced plants of her small conservatory, the broad green pastures of Barlewell, its glossy shrubberies, and parterres overflowing with flowers, rose before her mind's eye.

At that moment of the year, "one entire and perfect amethyst," produced by the

blossoming of its rhododendrons, appeared to surround the place; while the choice varieties of azaleas adorning the shrubberies, exhibited hues that might have put to shame the gems of the approaching coronation. All these she was forced to "resign, yet hope to be forgiven," because the claims of the country upon her husband, pinned him to the purlieus of Parliament.

Sir Ralph Barnardiston, had she suffered him to approach her, would have informed her that the sacrifice was superfluous. Sir Ralph Barnardiston would have hinted that the country at large was amazingly disappointed in E. H. And for once, he would have spoken truth. For the new member, conscious of the inadequacy of his voice to command the ear of the House, had been studiously silent; and was consequently wanting in the provincial renown derived through the interpretation of reporters. Of his influence *within* the House, none but its members were aware.

But by one of its wags he had been facetiously entitled Chamber Counsel to the Cabinet.

Still, with even these stunted laurels, Nannie was content. She knew the value of his intervention in the political reforms proceeding surely, because slowly and silently. She knew that among the P. C.s and K. C.s surrounding Lord Melbourne, there was not a mind on which he leant more reliantly than on that of E. H. She was aware that her husband might have occupied a high post in the administration ;—that he might have received honours, influence, emolument, and, perhaps,

Moving up from high to higher,
Become on Fortune's crowning slope
The centre of a world's desire,
The pillar of a people's hope,

had he not chosen to remain the gratuitous servant of the public, the disinterested friend of the premier. Why, indeed, should a man

in the possession of six thousand a year,—without vices, crotchets, or ambition, to prey upon his purse,—render himself the slave of a salary?

But their calm routine of life had its delightful holidays. Barlewell, from Saturday till Monday, afforded them a haven of peace available only to savages like themselves, who, to the crowded Opera and stifling ministerial soirées succeeding it, preferred the pure air of Heaven and an orchestra of nightingales. One might almost have surmised that Nature, having perused the essays of E. H., was disposed to crown her votary with her sweetest flowers and brightest sunshine. For from the date of his weekly visits to his Berkshire home, the Sundays had become Sabbaths indeed—serene and heavenly. Mrs. W. W. W. would have paid down a hundred pounds per week to any insurance office going, for the certainty of such weather for her “*matinées*.”

And how happy, how more than happy they were,—Nannie and her husband; that noble-hearted brace of *parvenus*, sauntering together over their home farm, or noting the improvements of their gardens. They had so much to tell each other! They seemed to meet at Barlewell as if living apart during the five intervening days; for the commerce of the world often interposes as impassable a barrier between people living together, as if they dwelt in different hemispheres. *His* was a narrative of action; *hers*, of thought and feeling. But the interchange was valuable to both;

Affianced in discursive talk,
From household fountains never dry.

Without children to brighten the perspective of life, those of the Brents became first objects to them.—But while Nina filled the vacuum of their loving hearts, Arthur was a grief and a puzzle. They did not understand his lingo,—they could not bear to

hear a man destined like Lord Lemoyne to the immortalities of Westminster Abbey, called "the Governor" by his beardless son.—It was all the fault of Eton.—*Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère ?*—

"I am afraid, darling," said Hildyard, after they had sat discussing the matter together under a beautiful group of variegated horse-chestnut-trees dispatched to them five years before by Lucas van der Helde, from his park at Utrecht—"I am sadly afraid that we must not contemplate human nature from the lofty summit of its two thousand years of civilisation. To judge fairly of our contemporaries, we should take our stand on a very humble level. Arthur and his slang are the natural growth of this century, as Fox and his dice-box of the last. Arthur Brent may not make the worse soldier, for remaining too long a schoolboy."

"Still, if he disgusts Lord Mardyke out of his father's house?"

"Mardyke's company is not worth caring for, if he can be frightened away from the girl he loves, like a bird from a cherry-tree, by a noisy clapper."

"Still, I don't believe E. H. would have persevered in his visits to Greenhill Lodge, had he been accosted every morning with—"

"E. H. would have persevered," interrupted her husband, "had Proget lain in ambush behind the gate to pelt him with his pamphlets. Even had Lord Wickham confronted me, with one of his frigid bows I should have made my way in."

"Fie, fie, fie! When even poor Madame Duménil contrived to awe you away by fluttering her fan! But about this uncle of Lord Mardyke's, who has reappeared in London among the lost tribes regathered by the coronation?"

"Lord Skewgill's return to England has a more personal origin. The death of some wealthy dowager-aunt has reconstructed his

shattered fortunes. He has done us little credit in Belgium ;—hanging on first to the Orange family, next to the revolutionary government, and finally, to the new dynasty. Whatsoever king might reign, (and give dinners at Lacken, or balls at Brussels,) Lord Skewgill has always been at hand with his tarnished uniform, and ‘*Vive le roi, quand même.*’ But no courtier was ever so great a favourite! The *bon-homme*, as it is called, of this unprincipled man, has assigned a marketable value to his pleasant countenance and jolly laugh.”

“It vexes me to think we shall have to meet at Mardyke Castle!”

“And why?—Easy to treat him with the distant civility which precludes all attempt at a more intimate acquaintance.”

“But when I reflect on Hawkshill, and poor Eugénie!”—

“Don’t reflect upon them, for it is useless.”

“If you knew the effect it produced upon me, when, that day at the Hague, I saw in

Herr van der Helde's gallery, the Wouvermans hangings, and family pictures, removed from the old house! My mother, my mother's people, seemed again to surround me!—And to think that the manœuvres of a Lord Skewgill laid the whole place in the dust!"

"Dearest Nannie, it is *Time* that lays all things in the dust!" said Hildyard, raising her hand to his lips. "If we are to quarrel with the subordinates he enrolls in his service, it would become a more than Thirty Years' War. Don't be too ferocious against Skewgill. It is never too late to mend; and unless I am mistaken, I discern in him symptoms of regeneration."

"Again—the work of Time!—Lord Skewgill is too sagacious to affect, under Victoria the First, the habits which ought to have disgraced, and *did* ruin him, under George the Fourth. But do not ask me to be civil to him. As the origin of the sacrifice of our dear Eu-

génie, I can never be in charity with this cordial-seeming, popular impostor."

At Barlewell, it was easy to be fastidious, —easy to be just. But in London, at that eventful moment, everything was in a state of *hurlu-berlue*. As if under an exhausted receiver, the heaviest and lightest objects had equal weight. Coronations are always stirring events. But *this* was an occasion unprecedented in the history of the world;—a young girl, fair and timid, about to become an anointed sovereign, and control the destinies of millions and millions of people! When will civilisation again afford such a sample of the power of monarchy, —such a proof of the subordination of the human race!—

Individual vanities became merged in the grand event. At almost every coronation, the assistants are engrossed by their own precedence, the fit of their robes, the form of their coronets, the arrangement of their equipages. On this occasion, public solicitude was vested

in the Queen. The royal maiden, with her youthful maids of honour, was an object of reverence beyond the consecration of an Archbishop. Her appeal to the hearts of the nation, was through the voice of Nature itself.

The wise, who watched the growing influence of that novel phase of royalty over the minds of a nation still agitated, like the ocean by the swell of a recent storm,—recalling to mind the text, “I have washed my hands in Innocency, O Lord, and so will I go to thine altar,” trusted that the blessing of Heaven was upon the new reign.—The foolish, who calculated only the ells of velvet in their trains, or cost of re-setting their diamonds, admitted that, *coûte qui coûte*, nothing must be spared to emulate, in modern times, those ancient pomps and prodigalities which first imparted majesty to a throne.

Among those who assisted in the ceremony with the most philosophic nonchalance, (next to the noble premier who held the reins of

government with a potent but facile grasp, as easy and careless as that of the tricorned Automedon who appeared to guide the cream-coloured horses of Her Majesty's state coach, though each was led by a groom,) was Lady Lemoyne.

Though proud to be there as the wife of one who had

Made by force his merit known,
And lived to clutch the golden keys,
To mould a mighty state's decrees,
And shape the whisper of the throne,—

her sole anxiety was for her pretty Nina; who, accompanying Mrs. Hildyard to the gallery, was out of sight of the peeresses' benches. Accustomed to watch the mutable countenance of her daughter for indications of her thoughts, she would have given much to witness, on the present occasion, the revelations of that expressive face. Lady Lemoyne fancied that, by watching her when Lord

Mardyke and Lord Rathronan severally approached the throne to do homage, she should have detected her comparative estimate of both.

But by her exclusion from the view she coveted, the new peeress was spared a painful moment. If otherwise placed, she would have seen, towards the conclusion of the homage offered by the peers, poor Nina supporting, with the utmost difficulty, the fainting form of Mrs. Hildyard. A moment before, no two faces in the crowded Abbey had excited more admiration:—the beautiful girl, all lustre and brilliancy,—the thoughtful woman, with her lambent eyes and noble brow. But now, the one was bathed in tears; the other, inanimate as the dead!—

It was a trying moment for Nina Brent. With every eye intent on the throne and its mysteries, every breath suspended, an appeal for even the slightest assistance was hopeless of effect; and even to a willing friend, to extricate a lady in a swoon from such a

pressure, and bear her over the eight or ten crowded benches with difficulty overstepped when vacant, appeared impossible. It was done, however. A brother-officer of Arthur Brent, to whom his beautiful sister was an object of interest, made his way through the throng ; and Nannie was borne through the lobby and down the stairs to one of the cool side chapels, boarded out from the heat and glare of the choir.

On coming tardily to her senses, she found herself seated on a roll of matting, reclining against a marble monument covered with the ghastly emblems of death, with Nina holding her hand ; and shuddered at the transition from the brilliant scene they had quitted, to that dim, damp chamber of the dead !

“It was the heat, dearest, was it not ?” inquired Nina, tenderly imprinting a kiss on her cold forehead. But Nannie was still too much bewildered to reply. She had seen a vision !—Nothing that she cared to talk about !

“Colonel Barnard is gone to endeavour to procure either your carriage or my father’s,” added Miss Brent. “But I have little hope that he will be successful. They were not ordered till a much later hour.”

Carriages, hours, or Colonels in the Guards were at that moment indifferent to Mrs. Hildyard; who, as reason dawned upon her, seemed to be again relapsing into faintness. Still, she made efforts to move.

“Better remain quietly here,” said Miss Brent, placing herself by her side. “Here, we shall be unmolested.”

And there they remained, among those grim old monuments, from which the scaffolding over the windows above nearly excluded the light; the deep roll of the organ pealing, requiem-like, in the distance.—Sad companionship for two beautiful women, arrayed in court costume!—

An hour passed away. They were still there. Even Nina was beginning to find the stillness

and gloom of the spot too oppressive, when Colonel Barnard made his welcome appearance; not with tidings of the carriage, but with permission to conduct them through the cloisters to the Deanery; where they might remain till the ceremony of the day was at an end. Arthur Brent was unfortunately on guard; but the Colonel undertook to convey intelligence of their whereabouts to Mr. Hildyard and Lord Lemoyne.

"I assure you, dear mamma," said Nina, when recounting, next morning to her mother, the events of the preceding day—"I almost feared at times that Nannie was losing her senses: when her faintness went off, her eyes were so fixed, and her words so incoherent. Either she is seriously ill, or has received some sudden shock."

"An atmosphere at 80°, and an excess of perfume used by some of your fair neighbours, are quite sufficient to account for a dead faint. Ever beware, darling, of marvel-

seeking. Remember the little mole in the fable."

"Do not, however, dear old mole, under-rate poor Nannie's indisposition! I feel certain that something is grievously amiss with her."

"A screw loose with Mrs. E. H.?"—cried Arthur, who had just entered the room, coming off guard after a day of much fatigue, and a night of much libation, in honour of the new sovereign; and who was now, in ungovernable spirits, unbuckling his bear-skin cap. "In love, perhaps?—But, no!—a turnip would be more susceptible of the tender passion!—As they used to teach us at Eton—

Quod læva in parte mamillæ
Nil salit,

or gibberish to that effect; which being interpreted, sister mine, means that the party is incapable of much emotion."

The flippant boy was instantly attacked by his mother and sister.

"You are beginning to unite pedant and coxcomb, Arthur," said his mother. "One at a time, if you please!—as Henri IV. said to the mayor and the donkey, who were both endeavouring to be heard."

"Which will you have, then mother? Coxcomb or pedant?—The former, you know, implies jester, by virtue of his cockscomb of office."

"*There spoke both pedant and cockscomb.*"

"Whereas your unhappy son is neither; but simply as dry as a lime-kiln;—

'I cannot argue, mother,

My tongue is parched and bound,

And my head, somehow or other,

Is swimming round and round.

In my eye there is a fulness,

And my pulse is beating quick.

" 'And you talk such wretched nonsense,

You really make us sick, ' "

added his sister, finishing his quotation.

"But if your temples stand in so much need

of cooling, Arthur, why not have walked round by Spring Gardens, as you came off guard, and inquired after Mrs. Hildyard?"—

"Exactly what I did. I presented all your compliments, and appealed to that solemn butler of theirs, who looks so like a D.C.L."—

"And he told you—"

"That Mr. and Mrs. Hildyard were as well as could be expected, and at breakfast together; which, I thought, sounded conjugal and comfortable. And now, that your hearts are at ease, pray listen to my account of the glorious fire-works displayed last night in the Green Park. No?—Then please to favour me with yours of the ball at Apsley House. No, again?—Then, good bye, refractory females, till you can drive Mrs. Hildyard and her megrims out of your head. I must go and procure from my trusty henchman a sparkling bowl of soda water, beng the twentieth I have quaffed in the last four-and twenty

hours, to the health of our sovereign lady the Queen."

But to dismiss Mrs. Hildyard from their thoughts, was far less easy than to get rid of the noisy young Guardsman. Even his account of her amendment did not prevent them from driving to Spring Gardens, as soon as they could obtain the carriage.

But they were too late. On reaching the door, they found that the D.C.L. had amended his bulletin.

"His lady, having suffered much from the fatigues of the day before, was gone down to Barlewell for a few days' recreation and change of air."

CHAPTER XI.

IN announcing to her husband her desire for a little country quiet and retirement after the exertions of the coronation day, Mrs. Hildyard was aware that he was unable to bear her company. Urgent public business must detain him in town.

But E. H.—thus left alone in London,—had no excuse for not dining on the following Wednesday with Lord Mardyke; who, being now in possession of his father's princely house on Carlton Terrace, was supposed to give the best bachelor dinners of the season. Continental experience, engrafted on

English *savoir vivre*, enabled him to assort his company as judiciously as his bills of fare.

On the day in question, however, he was less happy than usual in the selection of his guests. The Comte de Lanville, the most tolerant of human beings, accustomed to meet Lord Skewgill at Lacken and the court of King Leopold, with whom, from the moment of his election to the throne of Belgium, the feline lord had crept into favour, was no longer the dupe of his jolly laugh, — no longer fascinated by his loving, brown eyes ; and in a dinner of eight people, it is unpleasant to find oneself dipping in the dish with a Judas.

The other five persons assembled were Lord Lemoyne, Lord Lewis Crawford, a smirking French attaché, Progget the pamphleteer, and a junior lord of the Admiralty ; and between the members of this heterogeneous party, there was as much sympathy as amongst those

very odd fishes, the "*cari et amati pesci*," preached to by St. Antony.

The ceremony of the preceding day was of course the theme of general comment; some, finding everything august, everything right; others, finding all tawdry, all wrong; while Lord Skewgill, for the first time in company with the renowned E. H., endeavoured to decry coronations in general, in the tone he considered likely to be acceptable to a radical;—adducing the revolutionised kingdoms of France and Belgium, in proof that such costly solemnizations are altogether superfluous; and ending with the hacknied quotation that "kings themselves are but ceremonies."

"The more reason," replied Hildyard, to whom he was pointedly addressing himself, "to spare no cost that tends to render the institution permanent. As well complain of the expense of engrossing an Act of Parliament!"

The tone in which this insignificant remark

was uttered, was so dry, that Lord Skewgill felt as if sawdust had been thrown into his face ;—when, fortunately, little Progget, who had been reading up, for his table-talk, all the histories, chronicles, and memoirs connected with English coronations from the earliest times, cut dexterously in ; and in a loud key and Somersetshire dialect, commenced his string of anecdotes, which, like the line of carriages of the preceding day, seemed likely to last three miles without a break.

But Lord Skewgill, who had now recovered his breath, and was sufficiently acquainted with the habits of his nephew's toady, to foresee one of the monologues fatal to cheerful conversation, cut him short in a moment. When Progget commenced with "As I was observing this morning at the Athenæum, to Mardyke, respecting English coronations," up went his lordship's hatchet, like a fireman's clearing away a dangerous rafter.

"If you've told your story once to-day, my

dear fellow," said he, with one of his jolly laughs, "that will do for the present. Shut up, my good Progget. We've had enough of coronations for one while. Mardyke, what's doing in the Lords this evening?—I saw carriages, as I drove past."

But that poor little Progget had an incomparable *timbale de cailles* to fall back upon, he would have been sorely discomfited. But he laid the flattering unction to his lips, and was appeased. Next to dazzling the little party with which he was so uncongenial, by the display of his erudition, his object was to appropriate some inedited aphorism of E. H., or some malicious witticism of Lord Skewgill, to add to his stock-in-trade as a diner-out. But in both cases he was disappointed; E. H. said nothing that might not have been uttered by any other sensible man. As to Skewgill, his stories were too long for repetition;—and alas! broader than they were long.

The disconcerted little anecdotist addressed

himself, as a last resource, to Léonce. But the Comte de Lanville, shuddering at his accent, replied in English of an equally unintelligible nature; and a dead silence ensued, till Lord Mardyke, an adept in dinner-giving, perceiving that the party was *fiasco*, endeavoured to rally his forces.

Aided by some *Côte Rotie* that might have warmed the stony heart of the Duke of York on his adjacent column, and a fluency that seemed golden as that of Pactolus after the brazen clamour of Progget, he related several "unrehearsed effects," which had enlivened both the recent and preceding coronations, altogether new to his hearers. No stale quotations from Sydney Smith, or Sheridan, or Jekyll. Nothing which has previously appeared in print ever deadened the table-talk of Lord Mardyke.

Scarcely, however, was the dessert placed on table, when Progget disappeared; after exhibiting aside to Lord Skewgill a ticket for the

box of the beautiful Mrs. Harmer, as a plea for hurrying to the opera.

"My dear fellow, I could get a Duchess's at Mitchell's, for eight-and-sixpence!" was his bland rejoinder. But Progget was almost consoled for this parting sneer, by finding the fashionable Comte de Lanville leave the room with him, and offer him a lift to the Opera in his cab.

The moment the door closed upon them, Lord Lemoyne, who had been unusually silent during dinner, expanded into the sociability for which he was famous.

"One can't talk in comfort before Progget," said he, as if in apology for his previous taciturnity. "One feels in peril of being booked. I never invite a man to my table, who, to my knowledge, keeps a journal to be minced into light articles for some quarterly review."

"Was it not Diderot, who said of a brother Academician, that he prevented him from

dying in peace, lest he should convert his coffin into a pulpit, and preach upon him the moment he was dead?" inquired E. H.—"Just so do the anecdote-mongers of the present day make merchandise of the wit of their deceased associates!"

"In my opinion," added Lord Mardyke, "it would be scarcely worse to sell the body of a friend to the surgeons, than his soul to the critics. There is something positively ghoulish in such transactions."

"But after all, this unlawful registry of other people's ideas is not the worst chamber-practice of our little friend," rejoined the new law-lord. "Progget is a man of grievances.—Progget is a victim!—Certain oysters, when pricked, engender a pearl; but when Progget is wounded——"

"Pop goes a pamphlet!"—interrupted Lord Skewgill, with one of his mellifluous laughs. "A man treads on his favourite corn,—a pamphlet!—A periodical denounces that his High

Dutch is remarkably low,—a pamphlet!—A *gourmet* asserts that his notions of *la cuisine fine* would disgrace a *trousse-poulet*,—a pamphlet!—A lady declares that he undergoes more than Chinese torture to dwarf his ridiculous little feet,—a pamphlet!—”

“Come, come, come, my dear uncle,” cried Lord Mardyke, “do not flay my friend alive. Leave a morsel of skin on his bones, if only in gratitude for his services, the other day, at your son’s election!—”

“If he had but managed the business of his opponent!—Fred. might have stood some chance. However, here’s little Progget’s health, and may his shadow never be less,—*still* less, his substance,—both being already so diminutive.”

“At least, he has the merit of being disinterested,” observed Lord Lemoyne. “No little man ever published so many little books at his own expense; to be little read after all,—except by schoolboys, in the

linings of their trunks. Roscommon tells us that

Each poet with a different talent writes—
One praises, one instructs, another bites.

But Progget does what no poet ought to do,—
he *proses* !—”

Lord Lewis Crawford, to whom, or to whose party the Pamphleteer had rendered occasional professional service, would fain have endeavoured to interpose a word in his defence, as a useful little fellow,—a political jobber of all work. But, too anxious to stand on good terms with the father of Nina Brent to risk an argument with Lord Lemoyne, he contented himself with whispering his dissent from the general condemnation to the junior lord by whom he was placed : who replied in the same *susurro*—“I’m quite of your opinion. I’m horribly afraid of Progget. I would as soon tread on an adder as make that little man my enemy.”

“By the way, Lewis,” said Lord Mardyke,

feeling that they had enjoyed more than enough of Proget—"who was that handsome aristocratic-looking fellow with whom I saw you coming out of the Abbey, yesterday?"

"In peer's robes?—Lord Rathronan."

"The man was a stranger to me,—and the title is quite as strange."

"He succeeded to it only a year or two ago; through the female line, if I remember, as is so often the case with our more ancient baronies."

"Naturally!" said Lord Lemoyne. "Because in feudal times there was so much chance of heirs male being knocked on the head, that the wisdom of our ancestors allowed their titles and estates to *passer en quenouille*; just as the Salique law was established in times when a sovereign was required to lead his people to battle."

"It is incredible what caprice we exhibit," observed Lord Mardyke, "in cherishing certain laws and usages, which the changes of the

times ought to repeal: while we abrogate others, as obsolete. If, as old Montesquieu tells us, the laws of a nation ought to assimilate with its climate, soil, numbers, fortunes, they should certainly be modified with its increase of population, and changes of fortune. But to return to this old English Baron, Lewis, who looks so like a picture by Vandyke,—where did you pick him up?”

“In Paris, last winter, where his *succès* was prodigious.”

“Clever, then, as well as handsome?—”

“Longheaded. I should hardly say clever. He is not amusing. But have you never seen Rathronan before?—He is at every ball.”

“And I, at none.”

“He is supposed to be *aux petits soins* with one of Lord Wickham’s handsome daughters.”

Lord Lemoyne, who had been listening to the explanations of Lord Lewis Crawford, now became deeply interested. For Lord

Rathronan had been frequently named to him by his wife as an admirer of his own pretty Nina.

"I should not care to have him marry a sister of mine," added Lord Lewis, perhaps with malice aforethought, for *he* also was a dangler after Nina Brent. "Rathronan's temper is as rough as his speech is smooth."

"It will be tested if he marries into that self-sufficient Wickham family," replied Lord Mardyke. "Lady Wickham, looking you down over her eagle's beak from her five feet ten inches of dignity, is an awful institution. She ought to be head-master of some public school."

"I scarcely fancy that the Wickhams would accept Rathronan for a son-in-law," rejoined Lord Lewis. "He is, or was, a Catholic; and *they* are Church and State people of the first magnitude."

"No matter! If the young Baron is as rich as he is handsome," cut in Lord Skew-

gill, "depend upon it the old Earl will find out, as Henri IV. did of Paris, *qu'il vaut bien une messe.*"

But his remark was unheard. Coffee had been already served. The party was now rising from table; and Lord Mardyke, as he took leave of his friend E. H. beside the open window, could not forbear expressing his envy of Mrs. Hildyard's good fortune in passing so delicious a summer-night at Barlewell.

"But for the debate and probable division on the Factory Bill, to morrow night, I should have accompanied her," replied Hildyard. "To spend one's Midsummer holidays in London, in such weather, is indeed a privation."

And if the auspicious influence of the season was felt while surveying in the moonlight the stag-horned old elms of the Mall, how much more under the glossy beech trees of Barlewell, in an atmosphere freshened

by the gushing waters of the Thames, and sweetened by the fragrance of thousands and thousands of flowers ! The gardens seemed tapestried with bloom ; and, when, towards four of the afternoon, its feverish mistress drove through the shrubberies, the blackbirds and thrushes were lavishing their mellow notes, as if intent on convincing her that Nature has a “ warbling choir ” of her own, far superior to the shrill unfeathered choristers of the preceding day !—

But, alas ! that velvet turf,—that balmy atmosphere,—that prodigality of blossom, might have been the arid, bitter, nitrous waste of the Dead Sea shore, for any impression they produced on the bewildered woman who wandered through the shrubberies more to escape the inquisition of her servants, than from any pleasure she derived from the aspect of nature. Her heart was paralysed. She was scarcely conscious of her actions. The very ground seemed unstable under her feet.

For the grave had given up its dead!—*She had seen Maurice!*—

Arrayed in robes of estate, and surpassing in manly beauty the whole assemblage of the Abbey, resembling only the delineations of the archangel Michael she had wondered at in Italy, she saw him bend his knee before the new sovereign; offering his homage, in the quaint language of the coronation ritual—"I do become your liege-man of life and limb; and of earthly worship, and faith and truth, I will bear unto you to live and die, against all manner of folks. So help me God!"

And, alas! to her grievous knowledge, this liege-man—this arrogant-looking aristocrat—was the hapless outcast born in a public hospital, reared in a parish workhouse;—son to a felon done to death by the hand of the common hangman!—

It was in vain she endeavoured to persuade herself that her surmise was irrational; that she was the dupe of an illusion,—of a resem-

blance, — that the information obtained by her husband of the foundering of the transport in which Maurice Varnham had embarked, was too authentic to be doubted. From her place far above his head, the preceding day, she had been able to examine him for several minutes ; and the supposition which, during that time, grew into certainty so sure as to deprive her of her senses, was not to be impugned.—She knew him by that sure instinct in which a woman's heart is never deficient. Though more than ten years had elapsed since they parted, she *knew*, by a thousand little nameless traits and movements, hard to enumerate but never to be mistaken, that it was Maurice on whom she gazed !

But one comfortable thought, among the many vexations that oppressed her !—He was come too late !—Unlike Jamie in the song, his apparition produced no sentiment in her heart injurious to *her* Robin Gray. She beheld the object of her early love with wonder, with dismay almost approaching to horror, — but

without a particle of regret. The only way in which the fact that he still lived and breathed, affected her in regard to her beloved Ely, was fear lest his participation in the discovery should give him pain. He knew, on her own avowal, how, for years, she had loved this mysterious being.—How would he accept the announcement of Maurice's return?—

But was it necessary for him to know it? *That* was the question which fixed so vivid a flush on the cheeks of the excited wife. Would it not be kinder to spare him the annoyance of the discovery? He had never seen Maurice Varnham; and might be in the same room with Lord Rathronan without recognition.

On the other hand, this act, if not of deception, of reserve, would be anguish to herself. She and her husband lived together in such open-hearted confidence, that not a single dark spot had hitherto troubled their unclouded sky. Their position in life lent

itself to perfect openness. Hildyard was so free from vices and worldly companionships, that even the ordinary amount of trifling social mysteries gave him nothing to conceal. His friends,—Mardyke, William Barnett, Lord Lemoynes,—were, as in the case of Lyttelton and his Lucy, as much those of the wife as of the husband. Nina and her mother, too, were as dear to the husband as the wife. To create a secret between them, therefore, would be on her part a first act of treachery.

As regarded any future encounter with Maurice, she mixed so little with the world, more especially the world in which he seemed to occupy a place, that they might never meet again. To find him so placed (had the fact been recorded in a work of fiction), would have appeared forced and unnatural. But after all, was it more extraordinary than that she, the dairy pupil of Martha Rudgely, or that her husband, the son of a Manchester draper, should be the Hildyards of Barlewell

and Spring Gardens, courted by the highest aristocracy in the realm?—Maurice had ever asserted himself to be of noble origin. The apprehension that a revelation of his grandfather's high rank might lead to questions concerning the origin and death of his father, had probably proscribed more explicit declaration. But who was to surmise the motives of one so secretive,—so deceptive,—so inscrutable!

As poor Nannie pondered over all this, reclining her head against the shady seat embedded in the bank sloping to the river, with her eyes fixed vacantly on the spreading landscape, it was not those ripening corn-fields, it was not those tufted hedges, it was not that silver Thames, that appeared to meet her view.—But the bare hill-sides of Middle-dale, the barren moor, the dreary wold, the wrangling beck,—where she had lived and loved,—now nearly as much defaced and obliterated by the hand of innovation, as the

sentiments with which they were connected by the progress of time.

But who shall deny the impartial dispensations of Providence! Here was a woman who, though born in an humble sphere and amid the roughest poverty, had never known the pressure of a want; who, from her girlhood till now, had fared sumptuously every day. Not a sordid care had ever reached her. While others lacked and suffered hunger, her garner was plenteously filled. Yet all this prosperity was deteriorated by a canker infusing bitters into her cup.—Oh! who shall deny the equalising compensations of Providence!—

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CHAPTER X.

FOR the first time in her married life, Nannie looked forward with more anxiety than pleasure to the arrival of her husband for his weekly holiday. But, to her infinite relief, he brought with him William Barnett; to whom, in his rare visits to Barlewell, there was so much to be shown in the way of improvements, new offices, new walks, new works in the library, new animals in the pastures, that her languid looks escaped unnoticed. The village schools were to be visited; the new almshouses examined. No end to the interchange of opinions and projects between William Barnett and E. H.

Even at the breakfast-table, the following morning, they had engrossing topics of discourse. Both were anxious concerning their common friend, Lord Mardyke.

"He don't get on as I could wish with the Lemoynes," said Hildyard; "they do not render him justice. It is difficult, I suppose, to be impartial where such a daughter as Nina is concerned."

"I'm afraid," replied Barnett, "that most people are apt to judge of Lord Mardyke by Lord Garstang; and *that* boy has *not* proved father to the man! All the youthful flightiness of Garstang has evaporated. No one can be more *real* than he is now."

"And *we*, who know him, are aware that his heart is as tender as his head is hard. Still, Lady Lemoyne entertains a prejudice against him."

"She entertains too many prejudices. But her husband cannot fail to hear praises of him

from others. That fine speech of his on the Canadian Insurrection remains the gem of the session."

"A splendid maiden speech, however, often proves injurious to a man," observed E. H. "If confident, the applause he has achieved hurries him into rash and unequal attempts; if diffident, it renders him over-scrupulous about risking his laurels. However, on several occasions, Mardyke has shown himself as good a debater as he is an orator. I only wish his eloquence had more charm for Nina. For unless he should marry, he will betake himself to the continent again, and become a wanderer and a lost man."

"The eloquence most convincing with young ladies, I fancy," said William Barnett, himself a confirmed bachelor, "speaks in a fine person or handsome face. And what chance has poor Mardyke against that Paladin-looking fellow, Lord Rathronan, whom the Lemoynes allow to dangle after their daughter?"

"Less than they used, I perceive. Between ourselves, Lemoyne asked me last night, at the Reform Club, to ascertain for him whether Lord Rathronan were invited to the Wickham Park fête; as, in that case, he hoped I should excuse his daughter's attendance."

"And when is that grand affair to come off?"

"Nannie, darling, when are the festivities at Wickham Court to take place?" inquired Hildyard of his wife, who was seated in the window, perusing her London correspondence.

"The letter in my hand enables me to answer you," she replied. "Marshal Soult requested that the day might be appointed between the Guildhall dinner, on the thirteenth, and his visit to Birmingham, on the twentieth. The Wickham fête, therefore, is fixed for the sixteenth; but, long before that, the Van der Heldes will be here."

"In that case," observed her husband, "I

agree with you that it is best not to return to Spring Gardens for the few days' interim, and thus lose the advantage you have gained. I will take on myself the inquiries suggested by Lemoyne ; for it would greatly disappoint me if Nina were not able to enjoy so brilliant a fête. Our foreign friends, too, delight in her company,"

Mrs. Hildyard sat listening with more attention than she was likely to have given to any other projects of entertainment, private or public. For it had suddenly struck her that this "Paladin-looking" Lord Rathronan might be the Maurice on whom her thoughts were intent.

No sooner had Hildyard and his friend quitted her to make the round of the farm, than she hastened to examine the peerage. The dates—the particulars—thoroughly coincided ! "Maurice Delaval, Lord Rathronan, 17th Baron, of Castle Delaval, in the county of Kerry, born Sept. 13, 1808, succeeded his

maternal grandfather, John Ignatius, 16th Baron, June 4th, 1835."

Then followed the usual genealogies of the fifteen preceding barons of Rathronan. But of the marriage or issue of the sixteenth, not a word !

This, however, was little to be wondered at ; since all compilers of peerages apply to the peers themselves for the description and particulars of their families. All that followed was the account of their armorial bearings ; and

"SEATS—Castle Delaval, co. Kerry.

Masserogue, co. Donegal."

Maurice at last !—The whole mystery developed !—But further concealment was clearly impossible. This man was a friend of the Lemoynes ;—this deceiver was a suitor to Nina Brent.—It was at least some relief that, in the latter capacity, he was not sanctioned by her parents ; and that they would do their utmost to exclude him from the Wickham fête.

But the packet!—Still carefully sealed, as on that memorable night in Rome which had decided her destinies, the casket was deposited among other objects of value.— And why might it not so remain?— Why recall to the mind of Lord Rathronan circumstances he was doubtless eager to bury in oblivion? There was no longer any purpose in delivering the letter. She was happily wedded — what need to prove to him that the afflicting mystery of his birth had transpired?—Why unnecessarily humiliate a fellow creature?—

Mrs. Hildyard was soon forced to admit that, though the contents of the letter to herself might be suppressed, with benefit to all parties and injury to none, it was impossible to surmise what might be contained in the voluminous packet addressed by Mrs. Varnham to her son. Of that, the seal was still unbroken. Of that, the purpose could not be pre-determined. That letter might contain

family documents of importance, or notes of considerable value. It was her duty to see it delivered.

But how?—Any other species of parcel she might entrust to some public conveyance. But this missive, traced by the hand of the dead, and consequently irreplaceable, must be better cared for. Any other she might confide to the hands of her husband; but this ill-omened deposit hung upon her with the weight of the heaviest rock in Stone-Henge. It was neither to be retained nor parted with. Like the murdered body which encumbers our night-mare after much melon, there was no disposing of it!—

For a moment, she felt disposed to seek the advice of William Barnett. But what right had she to disclose the family secrets of another; or entrust to a friend what she had withheld from her husband?—Alas! alas! in this as in most instances, a single deceit was engendering endless deceptions.

For three days following, she was too much engaged with her companions,—in drives or excursions on horseback to Burnham Beeches, Henley, Dropmore ; or boatings, in which her companions officiated at the oar, or roamings by moonlight in the shrubberies, to hear the nightingales sing their last, and the wood-throistle its earliest song, — to find a calm moment for deciding upon her measures.

No sooner had they taken their departure for town, than she regretted not having previously made up her mind ; for, on referring to the Court Guide of the year, she found that it did not contain Lord Rathronan's address. That it could be readily obtained, was unquestionable. But to whom could she apply for it, without provoking remark and inquiry ? The few friends with whom she corresponded, knew them to be totally unacquainted.

She decided hastily at last. Nothing appeared easier than to forward the packet under cover to the Earl of Wickham, with whom she

knew Lord Rathronan to be in daily communication. Having re-enclosed the letter addressed to "Maurice," in an envelope bearing the superscription of "The Lord Rathronan, (to be forwarded)" she resolved to entrust it to the post, addressed to the Earl. No indication of the sender's name being conveyed to either party, Maurice would receive it, she hoped, as a missive from the dead; without reference to herself, whom he probably believed to have ceased to exist—if indeed any thought of her ever crossed his mind.

It was a relief—an unspeakable relief—when she locked the postbag that contained that unsatisfactory enclosure. Even if seen by the servants, however, it would have excited no remark; so frequently did letters from Barlewell bear Lord Wickham's address.

But the following morning, the idea startled her, as she opened the postbag for the day, that her letter, though anonymous, would bear the Taplow postmark; and that if the Earl

should trouble himself further about the matter than by forwarding it to his young friend, nothing would be easier than to trace it to its source !

Was there to be no end to her vexations ? The more she reflected, the more she foresaw the improbability of escaping an interview with Lord Rathronan ; the only thing in this world likely to give her a moment's pain ! For though it was easy to avoid the fête, she was not safe from the visits of Lady Wickham and her daughters, or from meeting them at the houses of common friends. Would it not be better, then, to secure a previous interview with this dreaded man, than run the risk of a casual encounter painful to both ?

Again were her restless self-communings renewed ; wandering though the woods, and by the river side ; still at odds with herself, and with the past ; and pausing abruptly every now and then, to ask with sudden spirit, *why*

she should suffer herself to fall anew under the tyranny of a mere idea; the influence of false consequence assigned to one whom she neither loved nor respected. And oh! what a relief to turn from the stormy sky which her own weakness had allowed to gather over her head, to the faultless companion assigned her by the blessing of God,—brightening, like a rainbow of peace, that gloomy horizon.

Poor Nannie was fortunately roused from her reverie by the sudden arrival of Clémence and her noisy, unruly boys; whom their father had judiciously dispatched into the country, as beyond the patience of a London Hotel; for it required her full amount of attention, united with that of Madame van der Helde, to prevent their drowning themselves in the Thames by unlawful appropriation of the Barlewell boat, or breaking their necks by mounting, barebacked, the Barlewell foals and ponies. One minute

they were trampling down the choicest flower-beds ; the next, climbing the tallest fruit-trees. Gardeners, grooms, housekeeper and butler, were fully occupied in defending their own shins, and their master's property, against a leash of malefactors, the eldest of whom was little more than ten years old.

Apparently these vivacious little Hollanders inherited more of their mother's Walloon nature, than of the stolid, solid, self-government of their late worthy old grandfather of the Hague.

Nannie could not but admire, when their bewildering escapes allowed her a moment for reflection, how completely the heart and soul of Clémence were wrapt up in these sturdy varlets. Her mind seemed to live in them, rather than in herself. To keep up rational conversation with her was impossible. While discussing the final adjustment of the long vexed Hollando-Belgic question recently revived, so interesting to the fate and for-

tunes of her family, or the far dearer subject of the fading health of their beloved Sœur Véronique, she would start up and rush to the window, to survey the warfare between little Adrian and a large setter, which he was endeavouring to harness to a wheel-barrow ; or dart out of the room, dragging by the waistbelt Master Lucas, detected in making a *montagne Russe* of the banisters !

Mrs. Hildyard had been often vexed by the indulgence accorded to Arthur, the spoiled pet of the Lemoynes. But the perpetual motion of these turbulent imps, was fifty times more harassing. She began to admit, with a smile, what she had sometimes surmised before, that her early isolation unfitted her for the company of children, and that she was perhaps happier, childless.

“At least,” was the immediate after-thought, “the peremptory interest they command, serves to repress over-indulgence in selfish griefs, and the creation of imaginary evils !

Clémence has not a quiet half-an-hour during the day, to be either sad or sorry, or fanciful."

Not much occasion for either, at Barlewell ! Madame Van der Helde was prompt to declare that she had never seen so enjoyable a place. The historical Château de Lanville,—the quaint old Lust Haus at Utrecht—were thoroughly out of favour after a few days' acquaintance with the velvet turf, gravel walks like marble, and roads like gravel walks, through beech groves that resembled the aisles of a cathedral,—of those highly-cultivated, perhaps *over*-cultivated environs, which to some eyes exhibit the factitious lustre of a newly varnished picture.

One golden afternoon, they were driving in a light sociable towards Taplow, through woods fragrant with the thousand scents of summer ; and having for once persuaded her friend that the boys would be happier if left at home with Wilken, their father's grave valet de chambre,

who, during their visits to England, officiated as pedagogue, their conversation was uninterrupted. Clémence was anticipating the pleasant change in the society of the Hague, likely to arise from the projected union of Prince William of Orange with Sophia of Wirtemberg, one of the most accomplished and high-minded princesses in Europe.

“You must have heard of her, dearest Nannie?” said Madame van der Helde; “a daughter of the Duchess of Oldenburg, so much fêted in England during the visit of the allied sovereigns.”

“You forget that in 1814, we were playing with our dolls !”

“True; but a woman so singularly endowed is still talked of. Her daughter, the cousin-german of her future husband (a connection I used to dislike, but to which you have reconciled me), will scarcely find in Holland the intellectual resources of Stutgardt. But Heavens !” she suddenly cried, as a

turning of the road brought within view one of the beautiful windings of the river, which Nannie ingenuously believed to be the origin of her exclamation. "Look yonder, in the distance ! Adrian himself coming to meet us !"

"No, not Adrian," said her companion, whose eyesight was clearer, as well as her judgment more accurate. "It is Lord Mardyke, staff in hand, on one of his pedestrian expeditions ; though what he is doing beside the Thames, when all the rest of the world is assembled on the banks of the Serpentine, is more than I can surmise."

In a few minutes, they had ample opportunity of learning. The carriage was stopped by his lordship, and an appeal made to the charity of Mrs. Hildyard.

"Where do I come from, and whither am I going?" said he, in answer to her questions. "I come from Wickham Court, and am going to Barlewell. And as I stole away while the family were at luncheon, it would

be only decent to drive me to my journey's end, and feed and cherish me. The day has proved far sunnier and the road far longer, than I expected."

They were soon on their way back to cold chicken and sherry; and Madame van der Helde who, in London, had thought the friend of her dear Léonce a little over-rated, was soon fascinated by his good French, and lively conversation.

"Question me judiciously," said he, "and I will tell you all we have been doing in London. But I warn you that, like Sancho Panza, my faculties brighten considerably after meat and drink."

"But surely it will not tax them very severely to tell us why you are at Wickham Court, when all the Stars, Garters, and Golden Fleeces are Polonaise-ing in town?"

"Because Lord Wickham, of whom I am the hundredth cousin a thousand times removed, insisted on bringing me down to

form one of the family council now sitting under his roof, to determine the arrangements of the Soult festivities. They find they can't manage to lodge a dozen Ambassadors Extraordinary (with their impediments), to say nothing of Cabinet Ministers and their kind; and many of these Excellencies will not hear of driving back to town after the ball, though the nights at this time of the year are so much pleasanter than the days."

"But will not their neighbours accommodate them?" inquired Clémence.

"The Wickhams have no neighbours.—Obliging nobody, nobody obliges *them*."

"And what do they intend to do?"

"I shall learn on my return. I left them in all the uproar of debate. They had not even decided the programme of the fête. The Marshal is to arrive about four o'clock, when there will be cricket-matches, quoits, and other rustic pastimes going on in the park, and a boat-race on the river;—a brilliant spectacle,

truly, for the hero of half a hundred fights !
—At six, a banquet within doors. Afterwards, fireworks in the grounds. Lastly, a ball. About midnight, please the moon, the party is to break up, and return to town.”

“ But all this sounds glib and well-arranged,” said Mrs. Hildyard. “ Where lies the dilemma—”

“ In a very small compass. The Wickham damsels, who have the casting-vote in their father’s house, want to trick out the place with coloured lamps, arches of evergreens, and all sorts of vulgar devices, becoming a railway-station or election ball. — Whereas I (the hundredth cousin a thousand times removed) have been endeavouring to convince them that a grand old mansion like Wickham Court, complete in itself, requires no such petty adornments. — *Tout cela, voyez vous, chère Madame, n’est que guinguette !*” said he, addressing himself to Madame van der Helde : “ and I would fain have the Duc de Dalmatie

behold a specimen of an unadorned English country-house of the olden time ;—a manor, not a castle ;—a residence, not a show-place. — However, finding those three stalwart Graces, the Ladies Wickham, bent upon out-blazing Vauxhall, and that I had no influence in the palaver, I crept mildly out of their divan, disdained all offers of a mount, and here I am !”

And there, indeed, he was : for they had now arrived under the porch of Barlewell. In the vestibule, Madame van der Helde was waylaid by poor Wilken, with heavy charges against her hopefuls, the two elder of whom were in durance ; and Lord Mardyke and Mrs. Hildyard consequently proceeded together into the dining-room, where a second luncheon was immediately served.

As soon as the servants left the room, to the utter surprise of Nannie, Lord Mardyke started from his place, rushed to the arm-chair in which she was seated, seized her hand,

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and pressed it almost as vehemently as he had done eight years ago before, at the gates of the Vatican!—Before her amazement could vent itself in words, he had explained the motives of his impetuous proceedings.

“Congratulate me, dearest Mrs. Hildyard,” said he, with exulting eyes; “I have reached the first stage on my road to a happy marriage!”

Interpreting the announcement in its literal sense, as applied to his visit to Wickham Court, Nannie clasped her hands in despair.

“And to Lady Marcia!—How mortifying, —how vexatious!—But they all predicted it.”

“Who are *they*? Not Hildyard and William Barnett, I hope?”

Mrs. Hildyard did not reply. She was almost in tears.

“Considering that you would not have me yourself,” said he, with a smile, “you take my interests strangely to heart!”

“Frankly, then—it is not *your* interests

that so distress me. I am thinking of dear Nina Brent!"—

"Think on, then; and kindly and contentedly; for it is she who has promised to be my wife."

It was now Nannie's turn to repay with interest his previous shake of the hand.

"If you knew," said she, her tears no longer repressed, "the value of her heart and mind!"

"I *do* know it; I flatter myself I fully appreciate it. But how could *you*, who know and love Nina, suppose for a moment I could prefer Lady Marcia Wickham?"

"You have been so frequently the guest of her father!"

"Did I not tell you just now, that I am their hundredth cousin, a thousand times removed? If a man is beset with invitations—dragged into the house by the collar—"

"Even then, where there are daughters, he ought to resist. But why are you at Wickham Court instead of London?"

"To enlist you in my cause. Had I known Madame van der Helde was with you, I should have come straight here, and asked your hospitality. But I heard you were ill, and alone."

"But how can I assist you, since your point is gained?"

"By having me for a guest during the approaching visit of the Lemoynes. By enabling them to see and know me out of that trying atmosphere of London, which warps every one's perceptions, in order that they may dislike me a little less, before I make my proposals to them in form. This is dear Nina's wise suggestion. Nay, don't tell me that your house is full, which I see written in your face!—Any servant's room—any sofa-bed will content me. Or accommodation in the lodge or gardener's house, would seem a palace."

"The gardener has nine children—the lodge-keeper a paralytic wife!"

"No matter. With your sanction I will answer for persuading them to put me up."

Mrs. Hildyard could not repress a smile at his vehemence.

"Do you remember once telling me at Rome," said she, "that love was a malady which men of sense and stamina threw off like the measles?"

"That was ten years ago, in my whelp-hood ; and since you recur to Rome, please to remember that the brazen gods of the Pantheon have been converted into the Holy Baldacchino. I am a reformed man,—thank God and your excellent husband !"

"I need scarcely assure you," said Nannie, warming at a compliment so acceptable, "that you shall have a pigeon-hole in our dove-cot, on Wednesday. I shall even take you at your word as to accommodations. For nothing will more recommend you to the affection of the Lemoynes than to find that, for their daughter's sake, you are content to descend from your pedestal."

"If they knew how I love Nina, they

would see that there exists no pedestal for me which she does not share."

"But why not go straight to them, and tell them so? Let Nina but convince her parents that she is attached to you, and in the course of half an hour, you will be one of the family. It is only their uncertainty of *her* sentiments, which has caused their judgment to fluctuate."

"Nina thinks otherwise, and Nina's judgment is henceforward my law. She wants them to be convinced, before they consent to our union, that I am not the cold, pompous, self-conceited mortal they fancy me. Poor darling! She fancies that a few days spent in the same house with me, in the ease and *laissez aller* of country life, will make them judge me as leniently as their daughter is pleased to do."

"I am not sure but she is right. They ought to render you justice before they adopt you as a son. But how will you manage with the Wickhams?"

"I have nothing to manage with them, beyond what the announcement of my marriage (which only waits the consent of the Lemoynes) will fully accomplish. I never gave the slightest encouragement to their projects. Their house has been open to me, or rather I have been forced into it, on the plea of relationship. As to Lady Marcia, there is a natural antipathy between us; and as I fear she has made up her mind (abhorrently I admit) to become Lady Mardyke, it is doing her a kindness to remove out of her way the obstacle to her becoming Lady Somebody Else."

"And have you confided to my husband your prospects of happiness?"

"*Have I!*—Do you suppose they *would* have been happy prospects unless approved and encouraged by him? He has promised me his utmost aid and support with Lord Lemoynes."

"Then why not have spared yourself a long walk on a sultry day to ask me what is already

granted ; since you are well aware that Hildyard and I have but one opinion between us ?”

“ Naturally — for I never saw brother and sister resemble each other more closely : the same grave equity of mind—the same tenderness of heart.”

“ Fie, fie !—*I* am not Lady Lemoyne, that you should endeavour to ingratiate yourself by the praise which, of all others, you know to be acceptable. Why not give me a rational answer ?”

“ Because the rational answer includes a communication which I hesitate to make—”

“ Relating to Nina ?”

“ No, dear Mrs. Hildyard—to yourself !”

“ You almost alarm me !” said she, when she saw him draw in his chair, and glance suspiciously at the door, as if apprehensive of Madame van der Helde’s appearance : from which, however, they were perfectly secure, as she had full half an hour’s work on her hands,

with her little insurgents, to say nothing of having to dissuade Wilken from a complaint to their father, which, daily commenced, seldom proceeded further than its first respectful invocation of "*Welgeboren Heer!*"

"You asked me just now," said Lord Mardyke, almost in a whisper, "whether I remembered some nonsense in which I indulged at Rome, eight years ago. Do *you* recollect my tormenting you, about the same time, with certain reports circulated by a knot of vulgar, idiotic, country-people of ours?"

Mrs. Hildyard nodded assent.

"Alas! I seem destined to present you with bouquets of nettles; for my communication regards——"

"More scandal about me?"

"Not exactly scandal—but mischief. The other day, in the Abbey, you may have noticed two persons seated in the opposite gallery; a handsome woman in a diamond tiara, escorted by a man in a court suit, who looked

very much like Mascarille as the sham Marquis in Molière's farce of the *Précieuses Ridicules*."

"No! my attention was absorbed by the ceremonies passing in the choir."

"While these people seem to have looked only at you. It was the Stodarts."

"Rose and her husband?—Strange that I did not remember them!"—

"Mrs. Stodart has become such a very full blown Rose, that I should not have recognised her, had she not accosted me by name, as we were waiting together for our carriages. It was she who told me the whole story of your being taken ill, and carried out of the Abbey."

"But there was no story. Hundreds of people saw that I fainted from the heat."

"Mrs. Stodart's version, on the contrary, was—(shall I offend you by repeating it?)—that you had been leaning for some minutes over the front of the gallery, pale and breath-

less,—seemingly distracted,—with your eyes fixed on one of the Peers. When he approached the Queen to tender his homage, she says, you suddenly clasped your hands, with an exclamation which, at such a distance, she could not distinguish, and fell senseless from your seat. She related all this to me as a plea for inquiring the name of Rathronan; whom she had seen speaking to me and Lewis Crawford, a moment before, and whom she pointed out as the hero of the romance.”

Nannie was silent. Her varying colour attested, however, a deep interest in all she was hearing.

“George Stodart kept checking his wife’s communicative vein; more particularly when she inquired what relation the tall lord with the dark hair was to you, or Mr. Hildyard? In return, I mystified them by stating him to be a Scotch duke, or something else that did as well; and should have forgotten the whole history by this time, but that I find it in

universal circulation, with the addition of circumstances, far from extenuating——”

“But which you are not, I trust, afraid of repeating?” enquired Nannie, faintly.

“Not if you promise to forgive me, should I inadvertently pain you by relating what, in my opinion, you *ought* to know?”

“You *cannot* give me pain, dear Lord Mardyke,” said Mrs. Hildyard, rallying, “since I am convinced that neither I nor my husband possesses a sincerer friend.”

“The scene, then, of the second act of this drama lies among the Wickhams. For some days past, Lady Marcia has been tormenting me with questions concerning you and Rathronan; who, *soit dit en passant*, is personally as much the object of her preference as Mardyke Castle in the abstract. A tale of mystery has been got up in the family, of a packet which reached the Earl, addressed in your handwriting, and bearing your post-mark, with a thick enclosure for Rathronan;

—some say containing letters returned ; some, miniatures ; some, a tress of hair. With the view of gratifying his curiosity on the subject, my hundredth cousin a thousand times removed, saw fit to deliver this packet in person ; when, to his horror, instead of receiving thanks for his pains, he had to summon servants to his aid, and, I believe, a surgeon :—Rathronan being so overcome on opening the letter, that his state was, for a time, alarming.”

On hearing all this, the state of Mrs. Hildyard herself became, if not alarming, most distressing. Tears burst from her eyes ; and she trembled from head to foot. Not from uneasiness touching the ill opinion of the Stodarts or Wickhams ; but from dread lest these statements might, in some shape or other, reach the ear of her husband. Too noble to interrogate her, he might be even now undergoing the utmost anxiety.

A glass of water, snatched from the luncheon-table, was all that Lord Mardyke could offer

as a remedy. But at sight of her tears, he was sincerely grieved. For as Spenser sings of his Una,

Nought is there under Heaven's wide hollow-
ness

That moves more dear compassion of the mind,
Than beautie brought t' unworthie wretched-
ness

Through envie's snares, or fortune's freakes
unkind.

"Was I wrong to tell you this foolish tale?" he enquired, as he received back the glass from her hand.

"On the contrary, most kind and most judicious. You have done the part of a friend. Fulfil it still further by listening to my explanations, and affording me your advice. By your cautious mode of relating the story, I conclude that the Wickham Court family infer Lord Rathronan to have been the lover of Mrs. Hildyard; which, I am persuaded, you never believed. But that he was once a

suitor to Nannie Balfour—nay, that he was once tenderly beloved by her—believe as much as you will ; for it is not only true, but well known to my husband. My attachment to *him* was the cause of that girlish rejection of Ely, which you learned, years ago, from himself.”

She paused to take breath and gather courage.

“About that time, fortunately for us both,” she resumed, “circumstances connected with *his* destinies rather than mine, parted us for ever. He went to India—I remained in Middledale ; where his mother, my friend and instructress, deposited in my hands, on her death-bed, a letter of some moment, to be delivered to her son if we should ever meet again. We have not yet met, unless you call the distant view I obtained of him in the Abbey, a meeting ; and, averse to an interview, and ignorant of his address, I was unguarded enough to forward the packet through the

hands of *Lord Wickham, as a person of trust with whom I knew him to be on terms of intimacy."

"And Hildyard knows all this?"

"Not a word of it: except that such a letter was once in my possession. But, like myself, he has for many years past believed the lover of my youth to be no more; and as it was from himself I obtained information to that effect, I was unwilling to revive a subject long dismissed from his thoughts, by telling him either that I had seen Lord Rathronan, living and in the flesh; or that I had despatched to him his mother's deathbed bequest."

"I fully appreciate the motives of delicacy that produced your reluctance. But alas!——"

"To own the truth," resumed Nannie, "we are so perfectly happy together—so contented in each other's love—that I tremble at even the fall of a leaf capable of ruffling the surface of our domestic peace."

"But why did you not consult William Barnett, or the Lemoynes?"

"There are facts connected with Lord Rathronan's family history, which such a confidence would have brought to light, and which I am not entitled to divulge."

"I wish the fellow had remained in India," said Lord Mardyke, petulantly. "I'm afraid he will be a perpetual thorn in our side. If Marcia Wickham marries him, no hope of losing sight of Lord Rathronan!"

"Now that I am relieved from the dread of Nina's becoming his wife——" Nannie was beginning.

"There never was the least chance or fear of such a thing!" interrupted Lord Mardyke. "Whenever she danced with, or spoke twice to the same man, Lady Lemoyne, so fondly devoted to her, fancied her heart in jeopardy! Rathronan used, I am told, to hang about dear Nina at balls; where not a word ever passed between them which she has not re-

lated to me. But to return to this odious packet, concerning which the Wickham girls are so inquisitive. Has he ever acknowledged it?"

"There was nothing to acknowledge. It contained not a single line of my writing. It contained neither my name nor address. Lord Rathronan is, I verily believe, ignorant that the Nannie Balfour he formerly knew is now Mrs. Hildyard, or even that she is still alive."

"And to think that it will be impossible to convince people of these simple facts!" cried Lord Mardyke, starting up, with an air of irritation.

"But why attempt it?"—

"Because Cæsar's wife must not be suspected."

"But if Cæsar confides implicitly in his wife——"

"In this case, remember, she has not confided in Cæsar! Should some mischief-maker—some Sir Ralph Barnardiston—some little

Progger, bruit the matter so that it reach his ears, Hildyard would be deeply hurt."

"Then I will sit down and write him every particular the moment you are gone," exclaimed Nannie. "Since pain, or rather annoyance, must be inflicted, better do it at once, lest the evil should grow by delay."

"A tolerably broad hint to me to be off!" said her visitor, taking his hat. "Well, God bless you!" he added, affectionately pressing her hand. "You have relieved my mind from two grand anxieties; and I shall return to Wickham Court to listen with more patience to the discussion of Roman candles and Catherine wheels, haunches of venison and barons of beef. And remember, dear Mrs. Hildyard, you are faithfully to keep my secret and Nina's, till Wednesday next."

CHAPTER XI.

CLÉMENTE VAN DER HELDE was prevented from interrupting the *tête-à-tête* of her hostess and Lord Mardyke, by other occupations than the discipline of her unruly boys. Before she had got through the second sentence of her reprimand to little Lucas, a travelling carriage drove to the door, containing the "Welgeboren Heer" in person; and in a moment, all was joy and clemency.

Adrian, a domestic man at heart, and having "supped full" of *fêtes* and shows, could no longer restrain his impatience to rejoin his family; while his lighter-spirited brother-in-

law, and the Comtesse de Lanville, who still played her part in the valse or cotillon as gaily as though little Eugénie were not ten years old, (during her absence, a *pensionnaire* under the care of Sœur Véronique, at Jette), enjoyed their nightly balls, and daily breakfasts, without the slightest thought of quitting London till the eve of the Wickham Court *fêtes*. As sister to the Prince de Courtrai, Eglantine had been received with especial distinctions, both at Buckingham Palace, and in every official and diplomatic circle.

It happened, therefore, that before Nannie had leisure to commence her dreaded letter to her husband, one in his own handwriting was remitted to her by her newly-arrived guest.

“I was in hopes that Hildyard would entrust me with his news by word of mouth, rather than by letter,” said Adrian; “for then, I might have had something interesting to communicate. But he chose to write.

I leave you to guess how much rather, had it been possible, he would have chosen to *come*."

A moment sufficed her to escape to her dressing-room, for the undisturbed perusal of the letter. So seldom since her marriage had she been absent from her husband, that scarcely a dozen letters had passed between them. Even now, on unfolding one in his handwriting, it seemed almost more as if cousin Ely were again addressing her, than that idolised husband so much a part of herself. Had she been less harassed, less unhappy, she would have perhaps anticipated a criticism on Milnes's Poems, or eulogy of Prescott's History, rather than the "Darling of my heart!" which appeared almost inconsistent with the bold, firm hand of E. H.—But at that anxious moment, the words affected her, even to tears.

"I need scarcely tell you," followed this fond invocation, "how much I envy Vander Helde the privilege of sitting with you

in the old alcove on the cliff, to watch the sunset of this heavenly day. But my parliamentary duties detain me till Friday night ; when, for the remainder of the session, I have paired off with Glossop, whose gout carries him to Wiesbaden.

“I dined yesterday, dear Nannie, with the Lemoynes, which is the nearest thing to dining with yourself ; for you are constantly in their thoughts. All three were in the highest spirits ; and when alone with Lemoyne after dinner, I discovered that this cheerfulness arose (on the parental side at least) from the sudden disappearance of Mardyke and Lord Rathronan. The former, I grieve to say, is gone down to Wickham Court, as if after Lady Marcia ; the latter, who has been seriously ill, is at Brighton for change of air. Lord Lewis Crawford, therefore, remains master of the field, and our dear friends are no longer in fear of losing this season the charm of their fireside. But it is all right.

For dear Nina herself is in the highest spirits : evidently not the least chagrined by the desertion of her knights. *I* appear to be the only person disappointed and vexed by Mar-dyke's departure ! Whatever the Lemoyne may think, they would have made the—I was going to say *happiest*—but the *second* happiest couple in the world.

“Lemoyne had a thousand amusing anecdotes to relate of Sir Ralph Barnardiston, whom he met the other day at dinner at the Whittinghams, in Belgrave Square, where they have been giving state banquets in honour of the coronation, as though Sir James were a cabinet minister !—

“Lemoyne declares that half of Count Alten's time is taken up in getting out of the way of this Guelphic knight, who when his excellency is out of the way, pretends to be attached to his embassy ; and gets invited to every public fête, by virtue of the blue riband from the infliction of which many English peers are

said to have escaped on their knees, when menaced with it by George the Fourth. . It was then accounted a secondary punishment for offences against the throne. Sir Ralph, however wears it as a French *commissaire de police* his tri-coloured scarf, or as a police serjeant his staff,—as a *passe-partout* to places where his presence is obnoxious.”

It was so unprecedented a circumstance for her husband to be even cognisant of the idle gossip of the day, far more to repeat it with the view of amusing his wife, that Nannie felt instantly persuaded she had been subjected anew to Sir Ralph’s malicious misrepresentations, and that Hildyard wished to mark his contempt for her maligner. She was confirmed in the supposition by what followed.

“This man boasts, I find from Lemoyne, that he was well acquainted with you at Rome ; and he exceedingly amused our friends, versed as they are in the real state of the case, by observing that it did not surprise him to

find you were '*not received* in London society.' Lemoyne thought it an excellent joke. But jokes at the expense of my wife, do not suit me.

"One joke, however, dearest, certainly not at *your* expense, amused me a little.—Sir Ralph describes himself as having made your acquaintance among some '*Manchester people* with whom he had the misfortune to become *encanailé*; a class which, he confesses, he scrupulously eschews, as never to be shaken off when once thoughtlessly encouraged.' Poor Stodart! think of pretty Rose's living to be disavowed by a Sir Ralph Barnardiston!"—

Yes! Nannie felt as convinced as though she had been an ear-witness of the fact, that the old serpent had been again at his wiles, and that Sir Ralph was one of the motors of the Rathronan scandal!

A far pleasanter occupation, however, than to enter into the results of his malevolence was

to note the change effected in the Van der Helde family by the arrival of the pater familias. Clémence became suddenly invested with consequence, Wilken with authority ; and the three boys, from rampant lions, became mice. And yet, all so happy together ! The transformation arose from the natural order of things. In that very limited monarchy, the sovereign spoke, and the two minor estates subsided into their lawful station.

A cheerful, chatty, dinner ensued. Adrian had a world of London gossip to unfold : how Eglantine had just accepted the high appointment offered to her in the household of the young Queen of the Belgians, formerly occupied by the mother of her husband ; and how, at the Palace ball of the preceding night, she had danced with the Duke de Nemours as *vis-à-vis* to Her Majesty. He also related as one of the *on dits* of the Travellers' Club, that " Sir Raff," their old acquaintance, had received a hint from the

vice chamberlain that, not having the *entrée*, or being specifically accredited by the Hanoverian government, he must not pretend to specific notice. The bubble of his new mission had burst, and he had been put in his place.

"I suspect," added Van der Helde, "that Léonce had some share in denouncing the impostor."

Meanwhile that wretched letter to her husband remained unwritten. The unexpected arrival of a guest had occupied her till it was too late for the post ; and her painful task still in prospect, secured a restless night to poor Nannie. The reports brought by Lord Mardyke,—the reappearance of Sir Ralph Barnardiston, like a bird of evil omen, on the scene,—embittered the pleasure she would otherwise have experienced in having Clémence and her family under her roof, and the visit of the De Lanvilles in prospect. As to the expected arrival of her husband, a sharp pang shot through her heart at the mere idea of the meeting.

Meanwhile, any one fortunate enough to witness the reception of Lord Mardyke at Wickham Court on his return from Barlewell, would have recognised him in a moment as a bachelor peer, with a rent-roll of some tens of thousands of pounds. For though dire had been the wrath of both mother and daughters at his sudden eclipse, they could not afford to exhibit their indignation more viciously than by a few playful reproaches.

It had been his lordship's intention to make his way at once to his own room, and remain there in ambush till dinner time. But, alas ! from a seat on the lawn where the whole party was assembled, he was espied at a distance, crossing the park ; and away stalked the most august and disagreeable of Countesses to meet him, like a three-decker steaming out of harbour with two fine frigates in her lee. Dusty, thirsty, weary, in no mood for polite conversation, the poor fagged pedestrian had to parry their flippant attacks.

“How tired he appeared!—Had he been walking a match, or only been on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Barlewell?”—Lady Marcia wondered that Mrs. E. H. had allowed him to return to Wickham. Lady Sophia assured him they had “thought of loosing their bloodhounds after him, as a runaway slave.”

He looked, however, so very impenitent, and announced so boldly that he did not stay and dine at Barlewell, because, on leaving Wickham Court in a couple of days, he was to take up his quarters there “for some time,” that Lady Wickham, though in the habit of bearing much from rich young bachelor lords, could not forgive him. She bided her time, however, for the retort *uncourteous*.

There was only a small party in the house; but Lord Skewgill and his son (ninety-ninth cousins five hundred times removed) had arrived from town, just as his nephew was plodding his way through the park. Having assumed to himself, in virtue of his long resi-

dence abroad, the office of a sort of *Introduceur des Ambassadeurs Extraordinaire*,—and a very extraordinary one he made,—the ex-lord of Braye Court felt anxious that an old mansion like Wickham, which had the honour to be connected with himself, should distinguish itself in so European a transaction as a fête honoured by the presence of the Duke of Wellington, and given to the illustrious Soult.

“I had no notion of meeting you here, Mar,” said he, as soon as they were seated at the dinner-table. “We settled at White’s hat you were off to Quebec, to cut down Papineau, and head the insurrection;—nay, I’m assured that you are backed to exterminate poor Durham, and become perpetual Dictator of Canada. And here I find you, after all, grazing quietly in Berkshire clover.”

“As if you were not aware that I came down to Wickham yesterday, as you and Frank have done to-day, to assist in raising triumphal arches for Saturday’s fête!”

“The Lemoynes were less well-informed. Her ladyship was hunting about after you behind every door and under every sofa, like the old woman who lost her silver penny, last night at the ball at Chandos House.”

“One of Progget’s inedited anecdotes, for a thousand !” retorted Lord Mardyke. “My friend Hildyard dined with the Lemoynes ; and for once, they spent a quiet evening at home.”

“You may believe your nephew’s statement, as derived from the best authority,” suggested Lady Marcia ; “for instead of helping us in the manufacture of triumphal arches, he has been spending the morning with his friend Hildyard’s wife.”

“Bravo, Mar !” cried his lordship, hastily finishing his glass of champagne. “Since you *must* frequent these radicals, let it ever be in pursuit of your neighbour’s wife ; not to find one for yourself.”

Lady Wickham, who, on the principle of

example to the servants, (though her drawing-room table was strewn with the works of Eugène Sue and Paul de Kock,) sanctioned no immoral allusions in her presence, put him to silence by a tremendous elevation of the chin ; and as no one was inclined to break the silence she had occasioned by frowning down Lord Skewgill, the opportunity seemed a good one for the perpetration of her vengeance upon Lord Skewgill's nephew.

“ And, pray, did you persuade Mrs. Hildyard to inform you, my dear Lord Mardyke,” said she, “ of the nature of the mysterious packet addressed to Lord Rathronan ; and her motive for enclosing it to Lord Wickham ? ”

“ No persuasion was needful,” he replied ; “ and I, therefore, wasted none. The packet contained papers belonging to his late mother ; and Mrs. Hildyard took the liberty of forwarding them here, because ignorant of Rathronan's address.”

“ Then, after all,” observed Lady Sophia,

giddily, "in spite of the fainting scene in the Abbey, he never *was* a lover of hers?"

"Pardon me :—a *suitor*—and a rejected one."

"Rathronan rejected by Mrs. Elisha Hildyard!" cried Lord Skewgill, with one of his jolliest laughs. "Come, come, come!"

"It is even so, my dear uncle. She rejected *him* just before she refused the Comte de Lanville, and—*myself*. But in our case, as you see, she converted her admirers into friends for life."

Even Lord Skewgill was silenced. The frankness and firmness of "Mar" permitted no rejoinder. Indeed the astonishment of the whole party was too great for words. . If told that Sir Ralph Barnardiston had refused the Garter, they would have been less amazed. A Countess's coronet, Mardyke Castle, and something about forty thousand a year!

By way of melting the frost which had suddenly benumbed the company, Lord Skew-

gill now afforded them a lively sketch of his railway journey from town as far as Slough, in company with Progget.

"The little fellow pretended," said he, "that he was bound for Windsor Castle, to examine some royal family pictures, for an article he is getting up on the House of Hanover. The real fact is, that he is going a round of Berkshire and Buckinghamshire visits, in the hope of profiting by Lord Wickham's invitation to 'friends staying in the house,' and insinuate himself into your fête."

"I am sure he is most welcome to come," observed the Countess, who had lost all spirit after hearing of Mrs. Hildyard's triumphs. "He is an amusing little man. Very useful, too; for, on wet nights, when nobody else is obliging, he is always on the alert to call the carriage. If you know where he is staying, I will send him an invitation."

"Spoken with the spirit of a woman who is entitled to have opinions of her own!"

cried Lord Skewgill, filling a bumper to her ladyship's health. "The poor little man has been vainly canvassing for one among the heads of the party for which he slaves like a nigger; and which treats him in return as people do the hedgehog kept in their house to devour the black-beetles; *viz.* allow it to prowl about at night, to rid them of something more noxious than itself; but spurn and trample on it if it presume to show in daylight."

Lady Wickham, who had not yet parted with the urbane expression of countenance peculiar to people whose health has just been drunk, looked exceedingly disgusted. Albeit she patronised Proggets, she considered hedgehogs and black-beetles unfit for mention to ears polite.

Lord Skewgill, however, was not to be looked down by a woman, though exhibiting the pride of a peeress and port of a grenadier. On the contrary, his jolly face expanded, like flowers in a thunderstorm; and his deceitful

brown eyes melted with benignity, as though he had been infusing balm into a wound, instead of inserting a probe.

“Poor Progget!” observed his nephew, in an audible aside to Lord Wickham, who was so absorbed in mental cogitation respecting his fête, that it was not easy to reach his ear, far less his understanding. “People say the little man has no friends. But it only needs to hear, when his name turns up in society, how he is hacked to pieces, to feel certain that he has nearly as many as the Hare of glorious and immortal memory!”

“But, my dear Lady Wickham, since you are so generous to Progget,” resumed Lord Skewgill, evidently disinclined to parry his nephew’s side-cut, “why not extend your kindness to my friends the Warburton Warburtons, who are wild to come to your fête?”

“And to every other person’s! No, no! for them, I have no room. They would be inviting me to their breakfasts next season;

and, in spite of my excuses, advertising my name in the Morning Post."

"I really believe," whispered his lordship to Lady Sophia, beside whom he was seated, "that your excellent mamma was brought up by the mother of Miss Edgeworth's 'Vivian.' *She* certainly learned very early how to say 'no!'"

It was, luckily, glorious weather. A tremendous storm, which had just desolated the North of England, seemed to have cleared the sky for the Southern counties. There was, consequently, no drawback on the alertness with which the whole party proceeded, after breakfast, to survey the grand preparations proceeding in the Park; hundreds of workmen levelling the ground for the erection of scores of marquees, and planting temporary avenues of fir-trees from point to point, for the "people's fête."

At the entrance of the Park, a fine old gateway was to be tricked out with flags and

evergreens; exerting themselves to the utmost to prove to the old warrior they purported to honour, that black was white; *viz.* that although Old England upheld its own venerable Duke as the greatest soldier since the days of Cæsar, the soldier next in their affections was the man whose glory resulted from having mowed down our legions; and who had been, more than once, accused of boasting that he had beaten us at Toulouse. The consistency of the case never much matters where huzzas and triumphal arches are concerned. John Bull, never averse to a flourish of magnanimity, fancied himself a model of chivalry by deafening with cheers a brave enemy, and roaring "See the Conquering Heroes Come," in the plural.

Among the most eager of the advisers and assistants was Lord Mardyke,—so happy in himself, that he would fain have seen all the world in equal raptures;—escorting Lady Marcia on her pony, for the better interruption

of the workpeople, and listening, with heavenly patience, to the Treasury minutes of the Earl, who was in a state of terrible excitement. The duty of proposing the healths of Soult and Wellington would naturally devolve upon him; and he had not only composed his speech, but was evidently learning it by heart; chewing it all day long between his teeth like areca-nut. When the clerk of the works respectfully inquired of his Lordship the elevation to which he was to carry the scaffolding for the fireworks, Lord Wickham burst into, "And while my house is honoured by the presence of a guest so illustrious"—as if forced to get rid of the words which had possession of his mouth, before he could answer "twenty feet." Involuntarily, Lord Mardyke reverted to the mental condition of Dominie Sampson, when bewildered by Meg Merrilies and her spells.

But this was not the worst. The mind of the venerable peer was not only sorely dis-

tracted between his national and political antipathies, and the desire to do honour to a chief from whose legions he had received the lance-prick and slight contusion which comprised the heroism of his career ; but was painfully puzzled whether to exhibit his patriotism in the uniform of his yeomanry cavalry, or in that of the gallant 21st Hussars, in which he had fought at the Bidassoa ; and which was preserved as heir-loom at Wickham Court, to immortalise, by a perforation that might have been as well accomplished by one of his daughters' knitting-needles, the wounds of this microscopic Coriolanus.

Unwilling to rely on his unassisted judgment in so vast a dilemma, he smuggled Lord Mardyke (whom he regarded more as a son-in-law than as a hundredth cousin a thousand times removed) into his dressing-room, where the two suits were laid out for selection ; the one, spruce and military, a *chef-d'œuvre* of Poole ; the other, from the exploded scissors of

Regency Stulz, with a waist between the shoulders, and its gold lace the complexion of zinc.

Lord Mardyke—a slight touch of “Garstang” being revived in him by the spectacle of the old gentleman standing perplexed, like Garrick, between Tragedy and Comedy—strongly advised the latter; fully seconding the notion of the Cornet of seventy-five, that his comical little jacket and exiguous pelisse were trophies quite as historical as the ragged banners at Chelsea or in St. Paul’s.

He reproached himself, however, for the time he had wasted in listening to the noble Earl’s bombast, and prompting his absurdity, when, on descending with him to the billiard-room, where Lord Skewgill was endeavouring to nobble his son Frederick in a bet, the amount of which, if won, he would have retained from his allowance, he found Lord Rathronan looking on, in earnest conference with Lady Sophia Wickham. A presentiment

of evil to come, rendered his bow to this unexpected visitor colder and more constrained than he could have desired.

He was evidently just arrived ; for he was still rendering an account of himself to Lady Sophia.

“ No, I have not been to Brighton,” said he, in reply to her inquiries, “ though I am told that the newspapers have despatched me thither.”

“ We did not learn it from the newspapers. Papa called some days ago in the Albany, to inquire after you,” said Lady Sophia, “ and your Indian servant told him you were gone to Brighton.”

“ You have fully accounted for the report,” replied Lord Rathronan, smiling, but in a somewhat ghastly manner. “ Moustai, my ‘ poor Indian, with untutored mind,’ knowing that the only time he ever accompanied me out of town, was to Brighton, considers ‘ Brighton,’ and ‘ country,’ synonymous.”

"You have been staying, then, in this neighbourhood?"

Lord Rathronan, reluctant, perhaps, to reply, seized the opportunity to pick up her ladyship's glove.

"Perhaps," interposed Lady Wickham, on perceiving her hundredth cousin just then enter the room,—“perhaps you have been at Barlewell, with your friend, Mrs. Hildyard?"

"May I ask, *where* is Barlewell, my dear Lady Wickham,—and *who* is my friend, Mrs. Hildyard?"—

"You should inquire of Lord Mardyke," she replied,—whom her daughters urged forward to be questioned. "I am afraid," she continued, addressing him as he approached the group, "that your intelligence of yesterday will prove to be one of what *you* call Mr. Progget's inedited anecdotes. Lord Rathronan has not even the honour of Mrs. Hildyard's acquaintance."

A little nettled, he replied with more spirit

than discretion—"Possibly. — It was *Miss Balfour* whom I described to your ladyship as his own and his mother's friend."

Had the astonished Maurice been disposed to persist in denial, the susceptibility of his impetuous nature would have betrayed him. A sudden paleness that whitened his very lips, spoke more eloquently than words.

"Miss Balfour, then, is still living?" said he, in a hoarse voice, turning suddenly upon Lord Mardyke.

"Living, happy, and prosperous!"—was the prompt rejoinder. "Her husband is one of the most eminent men in the country; and one whom I am proud to call my friend."

The cross-grained temper of Lady Wickham having prompted her to render desperate the man whom she was desirous to convert into the husband of her daughter, the silence that ensued would have been indeed embarrassing, but that Lord Skewgill, who was losing his game, called loudly upon them to come and

admire the admirable play of his son ;—the sure mode, he knew, to obtain the advantage over poor Fred, whose hand was a little nervous.

The attention of the party was consequently withdrawn from Lord Rathronan ; and the respite, brief as it was, served to bring before his mind all the dangers of his position. For months past, he had been paying assiduous court to Lady Marcia Wickham. To Nina, his homage had been only such as is offered by men desirous to accomplish a standing in fashionable life, to the most admired girl of the season. But to Marcia, he fully intended to offer his hand. By her distinctions of fortune, family, and popularity, she was able to confer on him that position in aristocratic society, which his ancient but obscure peerage, his fine person but moderate means, were insufficient to command. Besides this, he really liked her. Her air of hauteur pleased him better than beauty. Her insolence of disposition was a virtue in

the sight of Maurice ! For some time past, he had looked forward to his marriage with her as not only devoutly to be wished, but as sure to come to pass, unless Lord Mardyke (whose real inclinations a lover's jealousy had enabled him to fathom), should, from mere contrariety, offer her his hand. In that case, he was well aware that her mother's influence, added to that of forty thousand a year, would prevail against him.

To find him installed at Wickham Court, and, as the intimate friend of the Hildyards, probably in possession of the secret of his birth, was, consequently, a crushing blow.

The interest noisily claimed by Lord Skewgill from all present, in the concluding strokes of a game which had been as artfully contested as though Jonathan were his antagonist, and the stake thousands, fortunately withdrew attention from his air of chagrin ; and Lord Mardyke, as desirous as himself to prevent further allusion to Mrs. Hildyard, began to con-

sult him audibly concerning a disputed point in the programme of the forthcoming *fête*. Did he advise that the carriage of the Duc de Dalmatie should be met at the railway-station by Lord Wickham's mounted tenants, or by a troop of his yeomanry cavalry?— Which would evince the higher deference?"—

Before either game or discussion came to an end, several country neighbours dropped in to pry into the preliminaries of the *fête*; and after the manners and customs of country neighbours, render themselves generally disagreeable. Under cover of this fortunate intrusion, Lord Rathronan bowed his distant adieu to Lady Wickham, and escaped, unobserved by the rest of the family.

CHAPTER XII.

OF the early life of this strangely-fated man, who, in heathen times, would probably have passed for a victim of Nemesis, every distressing detail has been already given. It remains to be related how, on hurrying from Middledale to Liverpool, in the paroxysm of jealousy and envy, caused by the arrival of the Hildyards, he was apprised by Macglashan, (whose previous visit to Ilsington had purported solely to obtain from the open-hearted Rawsons information concerning the proceedings of Mrs. Varnham and her son,) that his grandfather Lord Rathronan, on learning his inti-

macy at Gridlands' farm, and his attachment to Nannie, had prudently forestalled the date of his cadetship.—His passage for Bombay was taken—his outfit provided.—He had only to embark.—

But Macglashan and Thorp were also deputed to inform him that if, from that moment, he resumed, directly or indirectly, his intercourse with the low people with whom his perverse mother had thought fit to foster his friendship, every shilling of his allowance would be withdrawn, and every acre of the Castle Delaval estate devised to the church of his forefathers.

Educated at the Jesuits' College in studied ignorance of the affairs of this world, the inexperienced young man believed in the possibility of this alienation. The noble grandfather, who had imposed on him by legal forms his patronymic of Delaval, appeared to *him* omnipotent. Already estranged from his boyish love, and disgusted by the homeliness

and obscurity of Gridlands, the stir of worldly ambition seething in his soul, obtained complete command over him ; and as he shook the dust of Europe from his feet, he resolved never to return to his native country till his own exertions, or the death of his grandfather, rendered him independent.

In India, all had prospered with him. The Mr. Delaval, announced by the Honourable Director through whose patronage Lord Rathronan had obtained his appointment, as grandson and heir to a peer, and whose education and abilities were of more than an average order, while his personal endowments were of the highest, was soon marked out for advancement. While Nannie patiently waited the return of Maurice Varnham to Middle-dale, Maurice Delaval was progressing rapidly from grade to grade ; sunned in governmental favour, and upheld by general popularity.

The report of his having embarked in the ill-fated Lapwing transport ship, had been

promulgated by the Macglashans to cut short all further inquiries from the friends of his late mother. But of this, the young man himself knew nothing. Having intimated to Nannie, at their last interview, that they were to meet no more, he considered himself exonerated from all further communication. The death of his mother, after years of suffering, had been notified to him by his grandfather's agents as a happy release ; and even the death of Michael Balfour, and his daughter's departure for the Continent, was announced in a postscript to one of their professional letters.

Two years afterwards, Macglashan had gone still further out of his way to mention that Middledale had been destroyed by a railroad, and that the daughter of the Gridlands farmer was happily married. But no mention were made of the name she bore, nor did young Delaval care to inquire. She occupied no further place in his thoughts. His arro-

gant nature recoiled from every reminiscence connected with Middledale. The place lived in his mind only as one of those scenes of early humiliation which he would willingly have razed from the earth. He had seen his mother there, working for her bread ; and indebted for the comforts of life to the low-bred Balfours. And when his thoughts were carried back to these mortifying facts by Macglashan's very superfluous intelligence, he dismissed both the place and the people from his thoughts, at once, and for ever.

It was the fact of Nannie Balfour's marriage supervening on the death of Mrs. Varnham, which determined old Lord Rathronan, a year or two previous to his decease, to recal his grandson to Castle Delaval, to be publicly installed as heir to its honours. Conscious that his own grasp upon the things of this world was relaxing, he chose to surrender them, while the act was still an exercise of power, to the hand which must shortly

assert rights of its own. And so it proved. For, in the course of a few months, Maurice Delaval succeeded to the barony of Rathronan.

Of the privileges derived from this accession, none, perhaps, would have been more acceptable than the right of expelling from the castle the Father Urban whom he loathed as the main origin of the humiliations of his youth ; and dismissing from their agency the firm of Macglashan and Thorp ; had not his astucious foresight reminded him of the imprudence of making enemies of men so deep in the disgraceful secrets of his family. Few, or perhaps none, besides themselves, were aware that the grandson and heir of Lord Rathronan, known only by the name of Delaval, was the son of Varnham the forger !—

One word from their lips, and the ruinous secret might transpire. His detestation of the two brothers must, consequently, be kept within bounds.

But the new baron had been too well trained at St. Gideon's not to possess perfect mastery over his emotions. Tongue and countenance were equally under control. With a gracious smile, he begged that Father Urban would continue to occupy the same apartments, and exercise the same functions at Castle Delaval, as during the lifetime of the late lord; and despatched to Macglashan and Thorp a cheque for their unexamined account, in company with a renewal of the power of attorney, entitling them to the management of the Delaval estates. But, after these bitter sacrifices, he made his parting bow to the old gateway at Castle Delaval, its grassgrown courts, and human rookery; and sailed for England with the intention of establishing himself for life in the more civilised portion of the British dominions.

As Lord Rathronan, he had already spent two winters in Paris, and a season in London, and seemed to be outliving the curse which

had prevailed over his boyhood. But the honourable position secured to him in society by his Indian reputation, Irish rents, and barony of eighteen descents, did not suffice his ambition. He still aspired to rise in the world, to distinguish himself a speaker in the House of Lords, and eventually, perhaps, obtain a post in the state. At some years past thirty, a man sickens of being a dangler at balls,—a bachelor of the Albany!—

It was the desire to acquire a *status* in London life, which, far more than the preference she evinced for him, attracted him to Lady Marcia Wickham. For a time, he had fancied that the daughter of a man so eminent as Lord Lemoyne would fulfil his matrimonial views. But then came the objection, insuperable to one who lived only for worldly applause, of her mother's eccentricity. He dared not risk the chance of being made ridiculous by the oddities of such a mother-in-law.

On Lady Marcia, his choice was fixed, He had even procured from Macglashan his Irish rent-roll, to place in the hands of the Right Honourable and right military Lord Lieutenant; and was beginning to indulge in visions of a well-mounted house in town, equipages becoming his rank, and all the *éclat* of a fashionable career; when lo! that terrible visit of Lord Wickham, to deliver his mother's letter, overwhelmed him with wonder and consternation! On the entrance of the Earl to pay his first visit of ceremony to the bachelor sanctuary of his future son-in-law, Lord Rathronan had resolved that, ere they parted, some sort of explanation should pass between them. He intended to solicit permission to pay his addresses to Lady Marcia; and was deliberating in what words to invest overtures so momentous, when the venerable lord presented the ill-omened packet!—

The immediate result has been already

described.—But not the night of agony that followed.

The handwriting of Mrs. Hildyard on the external envelope made no appeal to his feelings, for he did not recognise it as that of Nannie Balfour. Its plain bold characters resembled no more the tremulous lines of the little lass of Gridlands, than the accomplished, sensible woman by whom they were traced, resembled the anxious girl who used to tremble at his frown.

But when, the seal once broken, his mother's superscription, "To Maurice" became apparent, his heart was indeed moved. The past resumed its power over his feelings; and the dreadful facts connected with his position in life, passed before him, like the Spirit before the eyes of Job. No wonder that Lord Wickham was forced to call in medical aid to revive him!—

But after the sharp and sudden pang arising from this unexpected reunion with the dead,

came the conviction that his earthly prospects were blighted for ever. He who was so subjected to love of approbation that he had severed himself from the companion of his youth because two Liverpool attorneys represented her as low-born, and their superannuated employer, had spurned her as the offspring of boors,—he, who had detached himself from pretty Nina Brent, in dread lest her mother should he laughed at by ladies of fashion,—was himself about to become

A fixed figure for the hand of scorn
To point its slow unmoving finger at ;—

a pariah in London life,—an outcast beyond hope of redemption !—

For the person who had selected Lord Wickham out of the whole range of society to deliver to him a letter, the mere possession of which denoted that the black secret of his birth had transpired, must be some deadly enemy. To whomsoever Nannie had dele-

gated her trust, it was to a hand that knew how to strike.

His first measure on the morning succeeding this painful blow, was to hurry down to Middledale. Hitherto, he had spared his own susceptibility too tenderly to return to a spot replete with humiliating reminiscences. But it was now indispensable that he should unravel the Balfour mystery; and where, save in the neighbourhood of Gridlands, was he likely to find a clue to the present abode of the farmer's daughter? No prying valet, no tell-tale baggage accompanied his journey. He made his way rather as the Maurice Varnham of former days, than as the Lord Rathronan whose goodly presence excited attention, even at the recent coronation.

But though his previous knowledge that a railroad ran through the district premonished him of a change in its features, he was not prepared for the total demolition of the hamlet. He was not prepared to find the beck hol-

lowed into a water-course,—the furzy turf cleared and cultured into gardens.—Not a vestige remained of the cottage, once his home, or of the farm once the object of his coveting. Only ten years elapsed ;—yet not a trace—*not a trace !*

Yes, one ! In the neatly-tended church-yard, where he expected to find no record of the unhonoured dead, was the tribute to his mother's memory, placed there by the faithful affection of Nannie. A few gravestones were all that remained of the years that connected him with that once-loved spot !

Safe in his incognito, he hazarded a few inquiries of the station-master, as well as of the proprietor of a flimsy florid Gothic railway hotel, that called itself the Mardyke Arms. But both were new in the country. Middle-dale as it used to be, was to them as obsolete a place as if he had inquired for Eboracum. They had never heard of Gridlands, except from old Balfour's tombstone. "The lady

as placed them monuments," the landlord said, "had quitted Middll years and years ago, having married a Manchester draper."

Thwarted and desperate, he resolved to proceed to Ilslington. But even there, no better success awaited him. The railway had ruined the purveyor of horses. Rawson the corn-chandler had become a bankrupt, and migrated with his large family to the common refuge of ruined men—Australia.

He was almost tempted to visit Liverpool previous to his return to town; for Macglashan had formerly afforded information respecting the Balfours. But for this effort his courage failed him. Independent of his personal abhorrence of the cunning old brother of Father Urban, he felt certain that the little puckered eyes of the old man would see into certain facts to which absence and estrangement alone had blinded his brother. Though Lord Rathronan had taken no steps to emancipate himself from the Catholic church, his opinions

had undergone a considerable change; and nothing but the dread of incensing the old Jesuit, prevented the avowal of conversion. The faith originally adopted from interested motives, was still hypocritically professed at the same sinful instigation of self interest. But a personal interview with the hard old man who was capable of both detecting it and placing his finger on the plague-spot, was an ordeal he dared not encounter.

To London, therefore, he returned, still more dispirited than when he set out. The gay city, though still wearing its brilliant garb of coronation festivities—still crowded with opulent foreigners—still noisy with the *fêtes* by which the English aristocracy chose to mark its almost chivalrous loyalty to its youthful sovereign, appeared to *him* arrayed in sackcloth and ashes. He had no longer a part in the pageant. His hopeful career was at an end. A secret enemy was dogging his steps, who might at any moment denounce to.

the world the infamy branded on his shoulder. The scorn of the many—the chilling reserve of the few—the affable toleration of Proggot and his kind—what torture to a man steeped in arrogance to the very lips !

To advance further pretensions to the hand of Lady Marcia Wickham, till his doubts were solved, was out of the question. But as it appeared possible that from her father he might obtain indirect intelligence as to the mode in which the packet reached his hands, he took up his quarters for a day or two at Salt Hill, as if for the *fête*.

Such was the origin of the morning visit to Wickham Court, which was, in fact, a visit of discovery.

The position of Mrs. Hildyard, meanwhile, if free from the feelings of remorse and sense of degradation that harassed the soul of Lord Rathronan, was far from enviable. The Lemoynes, their son and daughter, had arrived at Barlewell, as well as the Comte and Com-

tesse de Lanville, all joy and spirits—without a care, without a fear. The master of the mansion, who was daily expected, and Lord Mardyke who was to arrive from Wickham Court, were alone wanting to complete the party.

But how difficult for the preoccupied mind of Nannie to lend itself to the part in which she usually excelled, of a kind and cheerful hostess! The house itself, with its library, billiard-room, and charming grounds, luckily supplied amusement independent of her exertions; and on the day following their arrival, a cricket-match of some likelihood was to take place in the village, between the Barlewell club and the Wickham eleven, who were to play each other at the approaching *fête*.

A cricket-club in any country village is a great fact, as symptomatic of good neighbourhood and prosperity. But nowhere could it be carried out in greater perfection than at Barlewell. As lord of the manor, E. H. had

established on the village-green a tent for the accommodation of the players; and supplied them with refreshment to a moderate extent on the weekly half-holiday devoted to the sport. His own labourers and out-door servants were the best of the players; and the visitors at Barlewell often found on the Green a pleasant summer lounge.

On the present occasion, a large procession was formed, on foot and horseback, pony back, and donkey back, in phaetons and sociables, to witness the sport. The little Vander Heldes were in a state of excitement that kept the nerves of the rest of the party perpetually on edge; while the high spirits of the Lemoynes, father and son, left it doubtful which was the greater boy—the Guardsman or the learned Jurisconsult.

A brighter day, a fairer scene, could have scarcely been exhibited by Mrs. Hildyard to her foreign friends. Barlewell Green was one of those beautiful snatches of English waste,

occasionally to be met with in the neighbourhood of Windsor and other forests; dotted with a staghorned oak or two, and a few grand old elms, whose imposing heads, contrasted with the neighbouring plantations of feathery beechwood and Spanish chestnut, corroborate the popular notion that the whole district was formerly a chase. Like some quaintly carved date, on the ancient lintel of some modernised house, the old trees seemed to connect the spot with former ages.

Bleached by the intense sunshine, the tent shone white as snow, in contrast with the bright green turf and massive foliage of the venerable trees; under which, were grouped the villagers, young, old, and *more* than old; for one white-haired nonogenarian was seated there in his wicker chair, who, seventy years before, was the most renowned bat in the parish; and now looked on with conscious pride on the sport, and on his great-grandchildren rolling on the grass at his feet. What

a motley throng!—What a joyous assemblage !
—What shouts !—what clapping of hands or
ironical cheers from the rival sides ; even the
dogs starting up from their doze in the sun,
to yelp their contribution of clamour to the
general glee !—

The foreign spectators, to whom the scene
was wholly new, soon entered warmly into
the spirit of the contest. Arthur Brent un-
dertaking to expound the mysteries of the
game to the beautiful Countess, (with whom
he had fallen in love a week before, because
he saw her dancing with a young French
prince, wearing a uniform more padded than
his own), in the French of Sandhurst, and
the slang of Eton,—alike unknown tongues
to the wondering Eglantine. To his assur-
ance, that she would be disgusted with the
bowling of the bumpkins before her “if she
had ever seen the play at Lord’s,” she natu-
rally expressed her wonder that the Upper
House should occupy itself with a pastime so

rustic ;—a blunder likely to afford an excellent story for the mess-table.

Poor Nannie saw with dismay her friends take up their position on the Green for the remainder of the afternoon ;—some, seated on benches under the trees, on the hoary moss of whose gigantic boles the sun was glinting like gold ; some, on the short, dry turf. Lady Lemoyne stood intently watching the all but centenarian, whose vacant countenance and fatuous smile reminded her, she said, of the average physiognomies of the dinner guests of Cordelia Whittingham ;—while Nina was good-naturedly endeavouring to keep the shins of the little Van der Heldes out of danger from random balls. But all were so well amused, that Mrs. Hildyard saw there was no chance of getting them away for hours and hours.

And her letter, still unposted !—Her letter still to be finished !—Another day trifled with, and the explanations might come too late !—Explaining, therefore, to Lady Lemoyne,

that she had letters to prepare for post-time, she delegated to her and Lord Lemoyne the care of her foreign friends, and stole away from under the trees, without waiting for carriage or servant.

There was a pleasant footway through the woods to Barlewell ; a short cut, which she often took in her errands of benevolence to the village :—errands not unfrequent,—for Lord Lemoyne, amidst all his hilarity, had noted with delight the close sympathy that seemed to unite his gentle friend with her rustic dependents.

Never had stillness and coolness fallen more refreshingly on her frame than when, after the glare and noise of the cricket-ground, she entered that quiet wood ; where her pathway between the tall ferns, shaded overhead by the quivering leaves of the beech trees, seemed to afford a refuge from even her own troubled thoughts. The very birds made themselves heard only by their flittings through the sprigs of

the hazels, or long streamers of honeysuckle ; or by a sudden flight when disturbed from the fragrant wood-strawberries bordering the path. At that season their songs are suspended. Is it because, like Lady Lemoyne, they are fretting over the flight of their young birds from the nest ?

The distance from the village to the house, through Barlewell wood, was scarcely a mile ; and Mrs. Hildyard had traversed more than three parts of the way, wholly intent upon her letter and its consequences, when she saw before her in the distance, (having just passed the wicket-gate dividing the wood from the shrubberies), the figure of a man advancing rapidly towards her.

For a moment, she believed it to be one of her servants, bringing a message from the house. A second glance undeceived her. The quick eye which, a few days before, had enabled her to detect Lord Mardyke, was not long at fault. The towering person and lofty

bearing isolated amidst the pale green foliage softened by the subdued light of the evening sunshine, was not to be mistaken.—It was that of Maurice—of Lord Rathronan :—the being who, like a nightmare, had been haunting her troubled day-dream.

His presence there was almost as unaccountable to himself as to Mrs. Hildyard. Like an animal held at bay, hemmed in by assailants, he had made a desperate start. All he had learned at Wickham Court made it clear to him, that to avoid an encounter with the Hildyards, was henceforward impossible. Either he must banish himself from society and quit the country, or know the worst and make the best of it. He resolved, therefore, to seek an interview with Nannie, (previous to the *fête*), at her own residence : if he found her alone, throw himself on her mercy ; if in company, denote by the nonchalance of his demeanour, his utter defiance.

That he should meet her as he now did,

alone, amid a silent, sacred, solitary scene, had not entered into his calculations.

On being apprised, when he rode up to the door of Barlewell, that Mrs. Hildyard, with Lord and Lady Lemoyne and other guests staying in the house, were at the village cricket-match, he had instantly resolved to follow them. The presence of the Lemoynes and Lanvilles, with all of whom he was intimately acquainted, would serve to lessen the embarrassment of the interview. For after all, when it came to the point, he *did* tremble at the idea of finding himself face to face with Nannie. But the lively chatter of Léonce de Lanville, like the drums and tom-toms that strike up to drown the groans of the victim, in an Indian suttee, was sufficient to overpower any betrayal of emotion.

The road-way to the village was readily pointed out to him by the servants ; when lo ! the first thing that met his eye after passing the shrubby-wicket, was Mrs. Hildyard ;

her white dress between the tall, green barriers of fern, rendering her a marked object.

Even had retrogression been desirable, it was wholly out of the question. He advanced, therefore, with extended hand, as if to greet an old friend from whom he had been long parted ; and, as when their first greeting was over she made no proposal to return to the cricket-match, accompanied her on to the house.

Those twain, whose hearts were now throbbing with emotion as discordant as once in unison, proceeded quietly side by side, talking about the weather ;—yes, actually about the weather—like any two indifferent people brought together by the chances of a morning visit !

“ You must have had a hot and dusty ride,” observed Mrs. Hildyard, as they entered the shrubbery.

“ But it is a most propitious day for your cricket-match,” rejoined Lord Rathronan.

And brief as they were, the sentences thus

exchanged, sufficed to satisfy both parties that they met no longer as Maurice and Nannie, but as the wife of E. H. and the suitor to Lady Marcia Wickham.

Before they reached the house, all embarrassment was at an end. But cordiality did not ensue. Mrs. Hildyard had clearly dismissed Maurice Varnham from her mind ; but Maurice Delaval, the deceiver, was unforgotten. In the strikingly handsome and dignified-looking man who so readily installed himself in one of the lounging chairs of her morning-room, *she* saw only the well-disciplined impostor of St. Gideon's.

It was too late in the day for the offer of luncheon. Several beautiful drawings hanging opposite the visitor, had been admired and explained to him as from the pencil of Mr. Hildyard, and a vase of fine exotics on a table near him, laboriously discussed. Nannie was even beginning to believe that Lord Rathronan had ridden over from Salt Hill,

under the burning sun of a July day, only to indulge in the smallest of talk usually consecrated to morning visits; when it seemed to strike him that his hostess might have preceded but by a few minutes the rest of the party, and that his *tête-à-tête* was likely to be a short one.

Suddenly drawing his chair towards the sofa where she was seated, he began to address her in a lower and more confidential key.

"I believe I have to thank you," said he, "for a letter recently delivered to me by Lord Wickham?"

An assenting bow was Mrs. Hildyard's cold reply.

"It would have been adding to the many kindnesses,—the many benefits,—conferred by you on the lamented writer of that letter, had you deigned to remit it to me in person," he continued; "and at an earlier period after her decease; for I own, I have sometimes

accused my poor mother of neglecting me in her last moments."

"At no moment of her life did Mrs. Varnham neglect you," replied Mrs. Hildyard, firmly. "From the day of your birth, as you are well aware, you were the first object of her solicitude. The packet, so many years in my possession, would have been delivered immediately on her decease, had I been aware of your real name and address."

Lord Rathronan started, and glanced anxiously at the open windows, as if apprehensive that eavesdroppers might be at hand. But on meeting the calm eyes of Nannie, he resumed his usual deportment.

"You must have heard at the time," said she, coldly, "of the anxious inquiries I caused to be made of the firm at Liverpool which had the care of Mrs. Varnham's affairs, with a view to the fulfilment of her last request?"

"Macglashan had no reason to suppose that the motive of your inquiries was of so

sacred a nature," rejoined Lord Rathronan inadvertently ; for he thus admitted being cognisant of her applications. "But why not address the packet to *him* rather than to Lord Wickham?"

"He had long ago announced your decease. Even when I had accidentally ascertained the identity between Maurice Varnham and Lord Rathronan, I was ignorant of your address."

Lord Rathronan's countenance lapsed into a scornful smile.

"It would have been easy, I conceive," said he, "to address it to me at the House of Lords. Nothing, in fact, more likely to provoke idle inquiries, than the mode in which it was transmitted. But it is useless now to recur to this," he continued, with a less self-possessed utterance. "You cannot have wished—you cannot desire,—to do me an injury. Our former intimacy leaves me, I admit, grievously in your power. My poor

mother's fond affection for you, served to place many miserable family mysteries in your keeping, which my altered position in life renders it vital to me to suppress. I am come, therefore, dear Mrs. Hildyard, to appeal to you, in all confidence and candour.—Are her revelations still inviolate?—Is my secret safe in your hands?”—

Lord Rathronan's face was now blanched with excitement, and his finely-toned voice tremulous with selfish anxiety.

“I should be indeed unworthy the love lavished on me by poor Mrs. Varnham,” she replied,—and at the sound of that fatal name, a shudder—as from a thrill of horror—passed through the frame of her companion,—“were I capable of inflicting a wanton injury on her son. All I know or may surmise connected with his infancy,—with the fate of his father,—the sorrows of his mother,—is to me as a sacred deposit;—nor have I ever breathed one syllable on the subject, to living mortal.”

An overwhelming weight seemed suddenly removed from the mind of her auditor. His lowering countenance brightened in a moment.

"At the same time, I must confess to you," added Mrs. Hildyard, "that, had you, as the world at one time supposed likely, offered your hand to the daughter of my friends, the Lemoynes, I should have required *you* to place them in possession of the facts to which you have alluded.—They might have afforded no obstacle to the love of the daughter, or consent of the parents.—But if artfully concealed, and at some future moment accidentally discovered, all confidence, all esteem, all mutual affection would have been destroyed. No one can endure the humiliation of being duped."

Lord Rathronan's face, which had resumed its natural hue on the cessation of his panic, now reddened,—not with shame—but anger.

"*That* question, however, is now disposed of," resumed Mrs. Hildyard; "nor can any future claim of the same nature arise. The

Lemoynes only are entitled to my consideration and regard equally with one to whose lessons and example I owe so much, and whose memory is still so dear to me."

"In *her* name, then, I earnestly conjure you—" Lord Rathronan was beginning, advancing as he spoke, towards Mrs. Hildyard, and about to seize her hand. But at that moment, the door was thrown open; and, with an impetuosity differing strongly from his usual composed demeanour, her husband burst into the room!

Delight at seeing him again, after more than a week's absence, was the first impulse of her heart; and with extended hands, regardless of the presence of Lord Rathronan, she sprang towards him.

"I did not hear a carriage, dearest Ely?"—she exclaimed—her eyes moistened by tears of joy. "How long have you been here?"

"I drove at once to the village—expecting to find you all at the cricket match. Lady

Lemoyne informed me you had just quitted the party; and fearing you might be ill, I hurried after you through the wood. I was in hope of being in time to give you an arm."

Lord Rathronan, who, on Hildyard's hasty entrance had retreated to the window, in order to give time for these conjugal greetings, now advanced; his high bred self-possession contrasting strangely with the hurried anxious manner of both husband and wife.

"It is an unexpected pleasure, my lord, to find you here," said the latter, bowing coldly and without offering his hand.—"I understood from Lord Skewgill, whom I met just now at the station, that you had left the country?"

"Not the first time that Skewgill has proved a false oracle,"—replied Lord Rathronan, endeavouring to rally his spirits and appear at ease.—"I am staying at Salthill; in expectation, like the rest of the world, of the Wickham Court fête.—What a charming place you have here, Mr. Hildyard!"—

But Mr. Hildyard seemed little disposed to echo its praises, or do its honours. He answered only in monosyllables. Usually the most courteous and hospitable of hosts, he took little trouble to conceal his desire for the departure of his visitor ; and nothing remained for the "paladin-looking nobleman" but to ask permission to ring for his horse, and take his leave.

"Thank God !"—exclaimed Hildyard, the moment the door closed upon him. "Oh ! Nannie, Nannie ! what an intolerable quarter of an hour you have condemned me to pass !"—

"I solemnly assure you," she replied, "that the visit of Lord Rathronan was as unexpected to me as to yourself—"

"Of course it was," said he. "Of course, of course. But what has his visit to do with my anxiety?"—And an affectionate kiss imprinted on her forehead, satisfied her at once that the wretchedness of the quarter of an

hour to which he alluded, whatever it might be, had no connection with her singular *tête-à-tête* with the paladin-looking nobleman.

All was briefly explained.

“When I jumped out of the carriage at Barlewell Green,” said he, “so many parasols and gay dresses met my eye, that I did not a moment doubt to find you in the group collected. — And, after more than a week’s absence, dearest Nannie, judge of my impatience to see your face again ;—particularly as your last letters appeared so much less cheerful than usual,—nay—a little more constrained.”

“I have had a great deal to worry me !”

“I guessed as much,—though without the smallest clue to your vexations.—Well, the moment Arthur Brent caught sight of me, he told me you had just ‘mizzled,’ and by way of further explanation, that you had touched nothing at luncheon, and looked horribly ill. I believe the boy took positive pleasure in

witnessing my alarm. His mother, however, interfered to say that you were gone home only to prepare letters for the post; which sounded so like a pretext, that I grew dreadfully uneasy."

"It was, however, the exact truth."

"But to whom can you have letters so important to despatch, as to cause you to leave your guests?"

"To only one person in the world. And as he is now here, the letter becomes superfluous."

"I should like to see it, nevertheless," said her husband, with another stringent embrace.

"And I deserve some reward for having run like a postman through the wood, in the expectation of overtaking you,—ill, and perhaps disabled; at all events, wanting an arm.—That young blockhead, Arthur!"

"Here then is the letter," said Nannie, having unlocked her desk with the little Bramah key hanging to her bracelet,—and

taking from it still unsealed, a voluminous packet.

"*Letter?*" exclaimed her husband, somewhat dismayed; "why not call it a despatch? What in the world can my Nannie have to say to me, that requires such copious explanations!"

"So much that is unpleasant," she rejoined with one of her grave sweet smiles, "that, since it was not fated to reach your hands prior to our meeting, and above all, previous to Lord Rathronan's visit,—I am inclined to entreat you will defer reading it till we are alone here again together. Keep it, and carefully, till the Lemoynes and Lanvilles are gone."

"What *can* be the meaning of all this!" said he, placing the letter in his pocket, and taking the hand of his wife. "What can this ominous envelope possibly contain!—Poison for the Dauphin?—or, like Madame de Brinvillier's mysterious enclosures—for your hus-

band?—Or are you about to set up as opposition Essayist, under the novel initials of N. H. ?”—

“Do not jest with me on the subject, dearest Ely,” she whispered, “for it has caused me many, many unhappy hours. Since I left London, I have not enjoyed one cheerful day!”

Her husband now looked really alarmed. He, who would fain have removed every thorn from her path, to hear such avowals from her lips!

“I cannot bear all this!” he whispered, fondly enfolding her waist. “Do not keep me in further suspense. What has happened, Nannie? And in what manner is Rathronan connected with the contents of your letter?”

“A few words will not satisfy either your curiosity or my own desire to open my heart to you—”

“It *is* open, my dear wife—my cousin—companion—friend! Its sentiments, emotions,

principles, are as fully known to me as my own. Some trivial circumstance, which you may have had to conceal in the interest of others, ought not to weigh thus on your mind."

He spoke feelingly and fondly; for tears were stealing down her face.

"It is scarcely a trivial circumstance I have to disclose," she replied in a faint voice, "You ought to know,—you ought to have known from the first moment I became aware of it myself—that the person whom you found sitting here just now—"

"Lord Rathronan?"

"Is no other than—Maurice Varnham!"

Even the composed nature of E. H. was not proof against such a revelation. But it was only as a startling, and scarcely credible fact,—as a manifestation of the dead alive,—as an incident likely to distress and disturb the feelings of his attached wife—that it so moved him as to cause him to relax his hold

of her, and stagger to the chair just occupied by the former enemy of his peace.

That he could ever again become so,—that Nannie had for a single instant hailed his re-appearance with either compunction or tenderness,—was as impossible for him to surmise or suspect, as to look for blackness in a sunbeam.

“Our short interview this morning,” she resumed, in a firmer voice, “was our first meeting, as I trust in Heaven it may be the last. Till I saw him at a distance, at the Coronation, I as firmly believed him to be no more, as you did, dear Ely, when at Lanville, eight years ago, you announced to me his being lost at sea.”

“It was the shock of seeing him, then, under such circumstances, that overcame you in the Abbey; and the dread of meeting him again, that sent you into the country,—that kept you ill and anxious—above all my dear, dear wife—absent from *me*! But Heavens and

Earth!—All these mysteries sound too wild—too romantic for the age we live in;—more especially as involving people so matter of fact as ourselves!”—

“My letter, which I rejoice to have written with the fullest detail, will explain everything that now appears insolvable. This man’s life has been a tissue of misfortunes and deceptions. His name was never Varnham. It was this that baffled our inquiries. In India, he bore that of his grandfather. In India, he was known as Maurice Delaval.”

“*Maurice Delaval!*” exclaimed her husband, as if struck by a sudden recollection; “and his grandfather a resident at Castle Delaval, in the county of Kerry?”

“So he is described in the peerage.”

“Then my suspicions were well-founded. But how strange a coincidence. How frightful a risk!”

“Am I, in my turn, to accuse you of being mysterious?”

“No, dearest ; for the truth may be very simply told. Three years ago, when I was preparing my pamphlet on an Amendment of the Laws for the punishment of Forgery, I procured facts and information in support of my statements, from every part of the United Kingdom. Among the cases forwarded to me by an Irish correspondent, was one of a certain Maurice Varnham, who suffered death for an act of forgery, of a private nature and to a small amount : the case being maliciously promoted by the father of his wife—a nobleman, it was hinted, who still survived at Castle Delaval. The name of ‘Maurice Varnham,’ (so long hateful to me, Nannie, as that of the opponent of all my earthly happiness,) naturally caught my attention ; and connecting the incidents of the case with all that was unaccountable in the position of poor Mrs. Varnham, and the conduct of her son, I entertained little doubt that she was the widow of this miserable victim. And

fervently, indeed, did I thank the Providence which had preserved you from contamination by alliance with such a race: the hard, vindictive old Celt, the cunning low-bred Saxon, whose intermingled blood had engendered a felon! I would not grieve you, my dearest wife, by communicating what would inflict fruitless pain. These people were in the grave. No need to cast a slur on the memory of the Maurice once distinguished by your love."

"All these details, Ely, you will find in my letter; and the visit of Lord Rathronan, this morning, purported only to secure my secrecy respecting them. It was readily promised. Yes,—we will keep his terrible secret! Henceforward, Heaven be thanked, he is nothing to either of us. Should he engraft himself on some honourable family without a candid avowal of the truth, the sin be on his head!"—

CHAPTER XIII.

FORTUNATELY for the reputation of E. H. and his wife, who, in their own circle, passed for the calmest and most sedate people in the world, the cricket-match was so stoutly contested, and the evening proved so genial, that the Barlewell party lingered till sunset on the green. Lady Lemoyne had exercised her vicarious authority so far as to send back the carriages and horses ; for the party, young and old, were eager to follow the example of their hosts, and walk home through the wood. Just as a pleasant dew began to rise, to draw forth the aroma of the oaks, they sauntered back to the house.

Nannie had consequently enjoyed two hours

of perfect repose, to obliterate all trace of the day's emotion. Cheerful as well as composed, she began, for the first time, to enjoy the society of her pleasant guests.

In the interval of her absence, the circle had been completed by a welcome addition. Lord Mardyke had made his appearance on the Green, to assist in cheering the last innings of the match; and on their way homewards, the only loiterers of the procession, as they wound their way through the fragrant shrubberies, were the new-comer and the happy Nina.

Happier still would she have been, had not her brother Arthur laid a detaining hand upon her in the hall, to whisper somewhat too audibly his inquiries whether she had enjoyed her walk;—adding the quotation more apt than discreet, of—

Now comes interchange of feeling—now comes
sympathetic thought;—

Nina, jade, you understand me,—though you
know you didn't ought.

How happy they all were! How cheerful was the dinner,—how unclouded the evening:—the judge as gay as a child,—but nobody—not even E. H.—as grave as a judge.

“You would congratulate me, indeed, on my escape from Wickham Court,” observed Lord Mardyke, in answer to Madame de Lanville’s inquiries concerning “*les préparatifs*,” “if you could possibly imagine the clamour and confusion of the place! The labours of the Board of Works preparatory to the coronation, must have been trifling, compared with those of my noble kinsman. All his family and household are astir, to say nothing of supernumeraries, carpenters, masons, gardeners, upholsterers, Proggets——”

“Proggets?” interrupted more than one inquisitive auditor.

“You left him the little fellow simply Tom Thumb. But he has now slain the giants, and become a hero. Progget has engaged to coach

the whole Wickham family for the fête. The poor old lord is too busy with his uniform and tenants, to undertake them; and when Progget called in person to thank Lady Wickham for her invitation, he found them confusing Marmont and Massena,—Soult and Jourdain,—St. Sebastian's and Orthes,—in a style worthy only of the Common Council or a public-school boy. But on finding that Progget had read up to the Duc de Dalmatie, for his London dinners, and was crammed as full of the Peninsula as Napier or Gurwood, her ladyship judiciously invited him to make the house his head-quarters.—Tremendous promotion for Progget! His notes on paper stamped with **Wickham Court**, will be good for notes stamped with **Bank of England**, from the Morning Ledger; besides procuring him invites for six months to come, from the George Stodart or Snobistic class of the community—"

"If he should survive so long!" added Lord

Lemoyne. "But Skewgill will never bear a brother near the throne of Toadyism. Progget will be picked up lifeless, after being called 'my dear fellow' and made a butt of, by Skewgill, like a poor little mouse after a game of romps with some playful pussy."

"Meanwhile, he is the happiest and most triumphant of pretenders ;—consulted by the clerk of the works for the decoration of his arches, and the confectioner for that of his cakes. The flags on each and all have been displaced and replaced, a hundred times, at his suggestion ; and by dint of carrying in his hat a folded yacht-club sheet of the maritime Flags of all Nations, it is amazing how well he is up in national ensigns. The rival dignities of the Imperial Eagle and British Lion, have been adjusted by him in a style to do honour to the Heralds' College ; and should the Conservatives ever come in, it will be an ungrateful injury if Wickham do not get him appointed Master of the Ceremonies to the first

embassy we despatch to the Celestial Empire."

"Where," added Arthur Brent, "he may find his shoes ready made."

A cheerful dinner was crowned by an evening of excellent music: the windows, open to the lawn, admitting at once the light of a beautiful moon and the fragrance of a wilderness of flowers.

But, under sanction of a long concerto performed by Clémence van der Helde, with a degree of perfection that Thalberg might have envied, the master of the house drew Lord Mardyke out on the gravel walk, on pretence of admiring the shimmer of the moonlight on the distant windings of the river; but, in reality, to consult him touching the Wickham-court version of the Rathronan romance.

Having by this time ascertained, from the long letter of his wife, not only every fact connected with the case, but that Lord Mar-

dyke and herself had conferred on the rumours in circulation, Hildyard felt no scruple in discussing it with this zealous friend.

"I confess," replied Mardyke, "that the report is by no means at rest. Lady Marcia, uncertain whether, after her mother's foolish attack upon him, Rathronan means to appear at the fête, will probably revenge herself on Mrs. Hildyard's reputation for the defection of her handsome cavalier; and my advice is, that, however much against your inclination, you appear together at this public entertainment. The old proverb, that the absent are always in the wrong, is never better authenticated than by the cowardice with which people sneak out of some slanderous report which they have raised, when confronted with the slandered. These people have gone the length of declaring you and your wife to be separated: the unusual fact of a week spent alone at Barlewell by Mrs. Hildyard, lending itself to their inventions."

Even by this, E. H. would not be incensed. So supreme was his contempt for the "they" alluded to, that they might have stated him to be a burglar, without moving his ire. Experience of the world, too, had taught him that lies and liars become, eventually, self-contradicted; and that *no* stigma remains permanent, unless founded on fact.

"I always intended," said he, in his usual sedate manner, "to appear at the fête of my Lord Lieutenant. I consider it a public duty; and far from a disagreeable one, considering who will be my companions. But I have little hope of persuading Nannie—so shy—so diffident,—so averse to every sort of publicity and display!"——

"As if you did not know that one word, or even look of yours, would determine her to walk into a well, or enter a house on fire!"

"The more reason that I should be cautious of squandering my power. But ——"

Lord Mardyke would not listen to another.

word. They had approached so near the windows of the drawing-room, that the graceful figure of Nina, attired in a simple muslin dress, with a few airy sprays of *Humea* drooping from her hair, leaning over Clémence to turn the pages of her music-book, arrested both his eye and step. To detain him a minute longer on the lawn, was impossible.

The following day, Nannie herself, at the suggestion of her husband, consulted Lady Lemoyne concerning the suggestion of Lord Mardyke.

"Wise and judicious advice!" was her decisive verdict. "Lemoyne himself could not have pronounced sentence more sagely. Come with us, dear Nannie. We shall muster so strong, that not even the eagle-beaked Lady Wickham will venture to look down upon you. Appear at the breakfast on your husband's arm; and this foolish story will be silenced at once."

Mrs. Hildyard, though not without mis-

givings, accepted the advice she had solicited.

“But why, my dearest friend,” resumed Lady Lemoyne, “*why* have you so long allowed these meshes of mischief to involve you? In the first instance as in the last,—in the case of Maurice Varnham as in that of Lord Rathronan,—all that was wanting to set you free, was the exercise of a little fortitude. The only way to surmount an inevitable evil, is by killing the lion in its cubhood. Face it the moment it appears. Meet it promptly and bravely. If you suffer it to overgrow your courage, there is an end of you at once.”

“You have pronounced sentence on yourself, my dearest Harriet,” said Mrs. Hildyard, embracing her. “For I am come to you on a double errand! I have still a petition to tender, to comply with which will require the exercise of all your strength of mind. We want to deprive you of your daughter.”

Lady Lemoyne, instinctively divining the state of the case, covered her face with her hands. She did not care that even Nannie should see her weep.

“Lord Mardyke had promised to be patient, and not put you to the proof by asking your consent to his proposal, till the close of your visit here,” continued Mrs Hildyard; “but both he and Nina feel as if they were acting treacherously, in concealing their views and hopes from her parents.”

“Nina, too!—She has actually given her heart to this man?”—

“Both her heart and consent to be his wife, provided yours and her father’s are not withheld.”

“What a mockery to ask it!—As if we were likely to refuse what she owns to be essential to her happiness!”

“But you must not grant it to them in this grudging, graceless manner. The dear girl would be but half happy; and what child

ever deserved happiness by more devoted filial duty and affection ?”

“ She is, indeed, an angel ;—the sweetest creature on earth,” sobbed the poor mother. “ But Nannie, my dear Nannie, *is* he worthy of her ? ”

“ A more amiable and conscientious man does not exist. Such is Ely’s opinion—such is mine.”

“ Yes, yes, you have both been conspiring against me——”

“ By endeavouring to perfect the happiness of one whom we love as our own child. Come ! A little fortitude, and the ‘ lion ’ of which you stand in awe, will subside into a lamb ! ”

While Mrs. Hildyard was thus smoothing down the opposition of Lady Lemoyne, her husband was presenting the case, with the same arguments, to the anxious father. It did not, however, require much exercise of logic to convince Lord Lemoyne that, since

the time was come for them to resign their daughter's company, they could not surrender her to hands more honourable. Before the day was over, in short, Nina was privileged by parental authority to enjoy a second walk in the shrubberies, arm-in-arm with her affianced husband; while her parents, seated in the alcove on the cliff, surveyed the spreading landscape, and discussed their beloved child's extended prospects, admitting that the sunshine of Heaven was bright upon both.

The general congratulations of the party were demanded that evening for the happy couple; and Madame de Lanville undertook to keep Arthur in order; the young Guardsman having evinced no small disposition to enact the part of Marplot toward the lovers.

Nothing could exceed the delight of Clémence and her sister-in-law, on hearing that Mr. and Mrs. Hildyard were to accompany them to the *déjeuner*.

“ Brava, bravissima! We shall be the *point*

de mire of the whole assembly," cried Eglantine, clapping her hands. "So let the two venerable Field-M Marshals look to their laurels! A bride elect, like our pretty little Countess,—a bride in fact, like our Nâni, who has never appeared in society since her marriage, are worth looking at. And by the way, *I* undertake the toilet of the latter, for the occasion; as I did at Rome, that of a certain Lucille Edgermond, with the utmost success, eight years ago."

And while, the following day, Adrian and Léonce escorted by E. H. and the Lemoynes, visited Windsor Castle and its picture galleries, and rendered the tribute of admiration usually conceded by foreigners to its unequalled site, the momentous question of *toilette* or *demie-toilette* was decided between their wives. Had Nannie's affectionate friend, H. Lemoyne remained to take part in the consultation, she would probably have suggested a costume bordering on coronation robes, or possibly something resembling those of

Sœur Véronique. But when the memorable 16th of July arrived, and Mrs. Hildyard made her appearance in the whitest and laciest of morning dresses, in a bonnet adorned with the simple flower more especially consecrated to the 23d, her unusual bloom, derived from the excitement of the moment, afforded all the further enhancement its simplicity could possibly need.

No person who witnessed the arrival of the Hildyards at Wickham Court, on that eventful day, could doubt their being one of the happiest and most confiding couples present. No person who beheld the beautiful and conscious-looking Nina, leaning for the first time in public on the arm of Lord Mardyke, could doubt that they were about to become so. A startling spectacle for Lady Marcia and her mother!—The garland of roses ornamenting the tent in which they were standing, seemed suddenly withered.—

The news of the projected alliance,—the

last new match of the day, was soon in circulation. The Lemoynes took joy with excellent grace; and poor Lord Lewis, unwilling that his disappointment should become too apparent, found refuge by the side of Lady Sophia Wickham, who always evinced an amiable readiness to be flirted with.

It was a glorious afternoon. Foliage and turf had been refreshed during the night by a slight sprinkling of rain;—just enough to alarm the expectant county with the prospect of a change of weather. But there was not a breeze to ruffle the well-draped folds of little Progget's banners and standards; or mar the effect of the military bands stationed at different points of the Park. A cleverly designed rustic trophy, emblematic of PEACE, formed of wheat-sheaves, artistically disposed on a foundation of well-ivied oak-stems, with agricultural instruments of every description, grouped into a pyramid,—produced an admirable effect on one side the grand entrance; while on the

other, commemorative of WAR, was a corresponding pyramid, composed of field-pieces, cannon balls,

Guns, trumpets, blunderbusses, drums and thunder.

The summer sun streaming upon their well-massed relief, these trophies produced an effect both novel and striking; though a little too much after the fashion of a melodrama at the Porte St. Martin.

At length, and long before the country neighbours of the Hildyards had exhausted their expressions of delight at beholding the hosts of Barlewell for once taking part in their social pleasures, came the salvo of artillery that announced the arrival of the Royal Princes, the two Marshals, and the great Earl in the small hussar jacket. It was the first military salute, saving the more imposing discharge at Her Majesty's coronation, which had greeted the ear of Nannie since, on the Scheldt, the Groot Brittanje bore

away the poor dying Dutch General, which it landed a corpse; and, involuntarily, she pressed the arm of her husband, on which she was leaning, in token of the reminiscence.

But on that arm she was not long permitted to rest. On the arrival of Baron Van Capellen, General Zelters insisted on becoming her cavalier; that she might explain to him the nature of the English rustic games which were now proceeding—about as appropriate to the occasion as the hussar jacket of the grey-headed Earl.

From the vulgar eye, the burly General, with his well-padded chest and firmament of decorations, whose Grand Cordon announced “an illustrious stranger” of some kind or other, bespoke increased admiration for the beauty of his fair companion; who, as a supposed foreigner of distinction—probably a Duchess—perhaps a Princess,—became the star of the moment. For, alas! just then, the British public was tremendously bewildered

by the magniloquence of court circulars, and the pageantry of a coronation.

Wherever they turned their steps, the applause became general; and while she was endeavouring to do the honours of the Barlewell cricket-club to the brave soldier who, at Antwerp, had proved so valuable a friend, General Zelters was equally occupied in presenting to her his *confrères* of the various foreign Embassies; who did not hesitate to pronounce this rural belle by far the loveliest Englishwoman they had seen during their sojourn in the land of beauty. Right proud was old Fabian, while twisting his cable of a moustache, to be able to reply,—“Yes, an Englishwoman; but with good Dutch blood in her veins!”—

It was while thus sought and admired, while receiving the compliments of Prince Schwarzenburg and the Prince de Ligne, to which her proficiency in foreign languages enabled her to reply with spirit and grace,

that she encountered the wondering gaze of Lord Rathronan ; who, on his tardy appearance, had been somewhat snubbed by the offended race of Wickham. Could it be indeed Nannie—the Nannie of Middledale—who, with the favourite old flower of former days intermingled with her beautiful hair, was thus honoured by the acclamations of the crowd, and the respect of royal and imperial representatives,—beautiful, accomplished, high bred, admired, beloved, — the favoured of nature, the favourite of fortune !

But this was not the culminating point of that day of triumphs. When the brilliant group of which the Duc de Dalmatie formed the centre, passed near the spot where stood E. H. in conversation with a cabinet minister whose name is still foremost among our political glories, the Duke of Sussex (who was escorting the venerable soldier),—the first and last Prince of the House of Hanover who ever appreciated intellectual distinction, or be-

friended literary men,—pointed him out, with pride, to the old Marshal, as one of the most remarkable among our modern philanthropists and philosophers.

“*Comment donc, ce garçon là ?*” exclaimed the Duc de Dalmatie, struck with the juvenility of his slight figure, and almost feminine features. Nor was it to a gray-headed veteran, like Soult, that his Royal Highness could quote the axiom of Bacon, “a man may be young in years, but old in hours ;” or assert that the renowned E. H. had not wasted *one hour* of his life.

The deference exhibited by the man of the sword to the man of mind, in the unsought presentation that ensued, was witnessed by hundreds : by none more wonderingly than the Stodarts, who, through the interest and diplomacy of Lord Skewgill, had obtained an invitation to the fête ; and to whom his lordship found much cause for mirth in doing the honours of the day.

"Yes, my nephew is about to ally himself with the wigs," said he, in answer to Rose's inquiries, on seeing Lord Mardyke pass, in the distance, with Nina on his arm. "E. H., and Mar, and his learned father-in-law, are about to organise a firm for the Reform of Parliament, the Criminal Code and Bench of Bishops, the administration of the Royal Academy and British Museum, the Zoological and Horticultural, the Trinity House and Rosherville Gardens."

"Gracious me! What work they will have on their hands!" exclaimed Mrs. Stodart, full of sympathy and good faith. "But why doesn't Mr. Hildyard get made something or other? It seems so odd to hear him so much talked of, and see him the friend of all the ministers, yet still plain Mister, after all! Surely he might get knighted, or at all events obtain some snug little place?"

"We will suggest it to him the first time we meet," cried Lord Skewgill, with one of

his jolliest ha—ha—has. “But I’ll tell you *who* is to be knighted, at the first levée; the little man you see so busy at the elbow of Lady Wickham. He is to be created Sir Flag-orneur Progget, M.C., to requite him for the trouble he has taken as Master of the Revels at Wickham Court.”

And when, ten minutes afterwards, Progget inquired, in his turn, the name of his lordship’s handsome friend, and what she had been saying about himself that so moved his merriment—

“My dear fellow, I hardly like to tell you!” was Skewgill’s frank reply. “The lady, who is wife to the Mayor of Manchester, was announcing you to me as the domestic chiropodist of the Duc de Dalmatie,—the Parisian Eisenberg, —without whom he never travels.”

In the explosion of laughter that followed this mystification, little Progget could not *cordially* join!

Splendid as was the fête, however, and for a wonder, thoroughly successful, a far happier day was spent, a week afterwards, at Barlewell, by the congenial party assembled round its proprietor. It was Nannie's twenty-eighth birthday. It was that on which the day for Nina's wedding was formally announced.

At Wickham Court, on the other hand, the sky was a little overclouded.

The Morning papers had conveyed the startling news of Lord Rathronan's departure from England "for a lengthened tour in the East;" and it was not possible for him to acquaint the Wickham family that his matrimonial projects had been impeded by threats of intervention on the part of Father Urban, and his brother Macglashan, who had resolved that he should never marry, unless a daughter of the true church.—The Delaval estates must not escape the grasp of Rome.

Lady Marcia, therefore, ignorant that he, as well as herself was a victim, had every reason

to resent the treachery of her chosen knight ;
—unskilled to surmise what she might have
had to suffer from

The thousand irreligious cursed hours,
Which such a marriage would have wrought
for her.

As to Lord Mardyke, he had already become, at Wickham, an *additional* thousand times removed from hundredth cousin to the Earl in the marvellous jacket.

Meanwhile, at the birthday dinner at Barlewell, not only was the haunch supplied by Mardyke Castle pronounced by the foreign *gourmets* to be finer than the venison they had so much enjoyed at Braye Court, ten years before ; but a far more applauded comestible appeared in the shape of some better than *prèsalé* butter, churned in commemoration of the commencement of their acquaintance, by Nannie herself ; and served on a lordly dish of fine old delft, which had migrated from the

glazed cupboard at Gridlands, with a cutting from its old jessamine tree,—which, like her of whom it was the emblem, flourished so well at Barlewell, that it already covered a southern wall.

Thus happy, thus good, thus loving, thus beloved, let us take leave of our low-born heroine, by turning the final page of her LIFE'S LESSONS.

THE END.

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Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove."—SHAKESPEARE.

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